

<研究ノート>

Teaching English Through Short Stories: Organizing a Literature: Language Course for Non-Traditional Students

Robert JUPPE *

Abstract

This paper aims at helping instructors of students learning English as a foreign language to organize and structure a course involving short works of literature. Actual units and planned units are examined for their appropriateness, with reasons given for selecting the actual units over the ideal. Moreover, activities used in the lessons, as well as student work, are examined for their effectiveness in achieving the goals of the course. The instructor hopes that this course can serve as a set of guidelines for teachers contemplating such a similar undertaking in the future, particularly in a course involving students in an extension center setting.

Keywords: short story instruction, literature for students of foreign language

OVERVIEW

From May, 2010, Tsukuba Gakuin University introduced its first set of courses in a new program called “The Extension Center.” Essentially, the aim of the program, at the outset, was to provide courses in foreign language, mainly English, and content courses that reflect the offerings from a typical liberal arts curriculum. The latter were to be divided into two types: those taught in Japanese, and a few in English, which would resemble university-level courses overseas. The former were to be taught in English.

Aimed at the community at large, the program was successful beyond all expectations. Despite decidedly and puzzlingly lukewarm, hesitant, and erratic support from the administrative staff at TGU, enrollment in the program flourished, and it became a significant income-generating component of the university, if not its most prestigious component, judging by the level of its initial reception.

One of the courses offered in the pilot slate was “Learning English Through Short Stories.” Its target audience was students with a high proficiency level of the target language, those who are capable of collegiate level coursework in English. This fell into the category of “Content Courses”

* 経営情報学部経営情報学科、Tsukuba Gakuin University

though it was essentially a language course.

Enrollment was set at a maximum of 15, a number that the instructor felt would enable all students to participate freely and actively, thereby helping students to exercise their productive skills (i.e., writing and speaking) while simultaneously focusing on receptive skills (i.e., reading and listening). As the course was to be taught using a discussion-oriented format, the instructor was confident that students could build upon many skills, such as vocabulary development or skimming/scanning, through a focus on writing and speaking. The objectives for the course were listed as follows at the start of the course, in a handout distributed on the first day of class:

COURSE AIMS:

1. To enlarge language, through formal study.
2. To enlarge ourselves (meaning the students and the instructor), through discussion.
3. To rethink our relationships with stories and books.
4. To sharpen our skills, inspire confidence.
5. To enjoy ourselves.

Above all, however, it was hoped that through reading and discussion, the students in this particular course could improve their language skills, discussion skills, and come to appreciate the short story in terms of both style and content. As the purpose of literature is essentially to delight and instruct in various respects, it was hoped that students could acquire skills for analyzing and understanding elements of short fiction- plot, character, setting, narration, and theme, both explicit and implied. Through the practice of looking into works of short fiction for meaning, it was hoped that the students could develop into keener readers of not only fiction, but any material in English.

It should be noted here that the actual course veered radically from what was initially planned. Originally, the presentations and lessons were to focus more heavily on analytical skills to help in understanding a short story. Instead, many of the activities wound up focusing more strongly on language development, as in foreign language development. Inadvertently, this was evidently desirable, as the course title did not suggest literary analysis, but rather language development *through* the study or use of literature.

Apparently, the course was a success if the numbers from the evaluation sheets are any indication. Never before has this instructor enjoyed consistent “1” marks from the charges (“1” meaning excellent), which ultimately led to the drafting of this paper. It is the author’s hope that this report will prove useful to any instructor contemplating such a course in the future. If it provides insight into structuring or organizing such a course, then one could call it successful.

INITIAL PLAN FOR THE COURSE

The initial outline for the course more closely resembled a basic literature course from a North American university. Focus on language learning was to be minimal; the learners were to concentrate on literature and literary analysis.

The original plan involved starting the course with a story designed purely for enjoyment, a work ostensibly devoid of “deep” meaning, yet rich in elements of style, thus serving as an effective and slightly easy introduction to the study of literature. The style, however, was to be focused upon. Flow, for one, was to be focused upon; the only deeper lesson to be drawn from the first story was the idea that storytelling often involves a sort of formula: There are interesting or intriguing characters; there is a crisis, or event, that involves these characters; there is an attempt to resolve their crisis or problem. The instructor hoped to impress upon the students that by following this simple formula, through this mastery of flow, in essence, anybody can become an engrossing storyteller to some degree. (Of course, this is a tremendous oversimplification and blatant exaggeration, but it is a goal to aim for.)

The story chosen for this purpose was “The Most Dangerous Game” by Richard Connell, 1924. As a fast-paced story of fair intensity and high excitement, it was hoped that students could appreciate the variety of adjectives used in the story, as well as start to recognize what E.M. Forster called “a round character”, as opposed to a flat one. Furthermore, it was hoped that students could predict the outcome of the story, or at least make an attempt at doing so, thus drawing their attention to the development of the story, or plot.

The tale was deemed suitable, for one, because of its engrossing start. Thereafter, the essential dilemma becomes more complex and the intensity of the story deepens due largely to the nature of the characters and the way in which they interact. The Aristotelian notion that with a strong plot or flow, nothing could be removed, altered or rearranged lest it destroy that perfection, held true with this selection. Furthermore, the story offers elements of irony, starting with the title; what we think to be the most dangerous game, as in hunting game, turns out to be in fact, a sport that ends in death. It is both unexpected and a nicely crafted double-meaning.

There is foreshadowing in the story as well. The conversation early in the story about a beast being unable to feel fright or panic seems to be idle pondering until the reader discovers later that this celebrated hunter (ironically, on his way to Brazil to hunt) winds up changing positions with his “game.” In another early example of foreshadowing, his host, a Russian general, explains that Cossacks tend to be savages, and then concludes their conversation by admitting, with a smile, that he himself is a Cossack.

For those readers unfamiliar with the story, what follows is a basic summary. A celebrated hunter, en route to the Amazon to hunt the most dangerous game known to humans, accidentally falls off of the yacht into the “blood warm waters” of the Caribbean after he hears shots fired on a misty night, just after he and a friend have finished talking about a mysterious and forbidden island thought to exist somewhere in the vicinity of their location at that time in the story.

The hunter manages to swim to an island, which turns out to be the island of which they spoke earlier, and becomes the guest of its owner, a former general in the Russian military and a hunting enthusiast. After being graciously and hospitably cared for, the guest comes to discover that the owner is hunting “the most dangerous game”- humans. After confessing his revulsion to the concept, and refusing to have any part in it, he becomes one of the hunted in a tense battle of wits and skill.

For the sake of those of you who have never read this delightful work, but now intend to, the author (of this paper) shall refrain from revealing any more.

Why, the reader might now ask, was the work jettisoned, or abandoned? Evidently, it serves as a fine introduction to the short story. There is a dramatic rise in interest as one reads; the plot builds to a climax, and soon after reaches a resolution. As mentioned earlier, there are elements of foreshadowing and irony; there is metaphoric language used. There is rich descriptive vocabulary, which is particularly good in describing the setting. This applies to the characters as well, which are decidedly round, never flat. One could argue that there is internal conflict (the main character, Rainsford, must be re-thinking his thoughtless and debasing comments on a hunted creature's feelings). The potential for predicting an outcome is rich in this story as well. Finally, a discussion on narration, first-person versus third-person omniscient, could have easily been introduced. How would the story, for example, have changed had Rainsford, the main character, been narrating the story? To what degree would the tension have diminished? How would the flow and plot have suffered? A discussion of how the choice of narrator shapes the outcome and effect of a work would have been possible using this story.

Actually, there was just one reason, and a very basic one at that. This was relevant to the second story scheduled in the course, which was also abandoned: "The Cask of Amontillado" by Edgar Allan Poe. Poe is generally credited with the notion that a reader should be able to absorb a short story in one sitting. It became clear, following the initial class meeting, that this story would appear more like a novella to the students of this class. Though "The Most Dangerous Game" was ideal in terms of form, content, style, and craft, making it a fine introductory choice, it was simply too long. (One might also recall that a full-feature film was made from this story with little alteration or addition to the plot. If anything, in this author's opinion, the film could have been *longer* than it actually was, had it been true to the literary original.)

In short, the entire course could have been spent on this story alone. With just ten 90-minute sessions, the instructor suddenly realized that too much time and emphasis would be placed on just one story.

To reiterate, this story was effective because it had an interesting and well-developed setting; it had an implied theme and an explicit one. Its plot revolved around an intriguing conflict or crisis, which then built steadily toward a climax and terminated resoundingly in a resolution. The title hinted much at the story's themes, and the characters were rich and well developed. The sole problem deals with the essence of the course: This short story is simply too long.

The next several selections were also replaced with alternatives. "The Cask of Amontillado" was to follow, with presentations and discussions to focus on narration, flow, and characterization. However, in terms of difficulty and complexity, this story was discarded. Again, in accordance with the title of the course... learning English through the short story was to take priority over analyzing and studying the story itself, which seemed overly taxing just from the first sentence of the story: "The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could; but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge." (Peithman, p. 169.) From the name "Fortunato" to "I had borne...", the story is difficult and requires both extensive background and syntactic explanation.

Regrettably, this story was also abandoned, which was a pity, given Poe's contribution to the development of the short story in the literary world and the splendor of the opening to this particular story in terms of piquing a reader's interest.

Here are the other selections that were also deleted from the syllabus.

1. "Young Goodman Brown". This story is a superb choice when focusing on voice. If told in the first person, it obviously loses a lot of its impact. Furthermore, it is excellent in studying allegory, as abstract meaning arises from the characters to serve as moral truth. In this case, the story serves as an example of a person moving from innocence to experience, or faith to a loss of faith. "Young Goodman Brown" is particularly rich in historical background: witch trials, Puritan beliefs, Calvinist faith, Native American displacement during the early days of European settlement, etc. There is much to discuss and debate in this rich gem from early American literature. As with the previous example, this story has a masterful setting into which the plot quickly plunges, immediately engaging the reader. This leads to a slow, dramatic evolving of the plot into a climax, with a wonderfully obscure resolution. Its surreal aspects merit discussion, and there is much symbolism in the story, metaphor and simile, that an instructor could focus upon.

There can be no doubt that this story is excellent in terms of discussing style and technique in short story writing. However, its themes, both implied and explicit, are worthy of extensive discussion and debate. As mentioned earlier, too, it is a superb case study for voice.

Why, then, was this story not used? Similar to the Poe tale, it employs a somewhat antiquated English in terms of complex vocabulary and sentence structure. It would prove hard for students of English, even advanced learners, to wade through its dense text. Furthermore, at nearly 16 pages, it violates the course ideal that a short story can be finished "during one sitting." Hence, a traditional, rich literary example was passed up. Again, this instructor urges that if time is not of the essence, then "Young Goodman Brown" would be an exemplary choice in terms of style and content.

2. "The Happy Prince" was yet another choice to diversify the syllabus. Since fairy tales are such an important component or stepping stone in a young person's literary development, the instructor wished to focus upon one such tale leading to a constructive lesson or moral at its conclusion. Rather than choose from the conventional canon of dark, dreary, often violent stories, the instructor opted for an unusual alternative: Oscar Wilde, a much, and unfairly, maligned figure in literature, whose fairy tales cleverly carried humanistic messages grounded in the Fabian socialist ideals of the times. These tales are, in the opinion of this author, far superior to the conventional fairy tales customarily read by or with children.

There is no need to focus on yet another of society's fatal torment of an extremely talented and enlightened individual; humankind has a long, deep history of baseless cruelty toward its own kind; examples border on the infinite. In the case of Wilde, however, it is mind-boggling to think that not only did he draft superb, tightly-woven theater scripts, yet he dabbled also in poetry, fiction, short stories, and even essays. His "Mankind Under Socialism" remains one of

the most brilliant and prescient analyses of socio-economic systems... and one needs to keep in mind that he wrote it BEFORE the Soviet experiment with socialism was even so much as a notion, making all the more visionary its warnings on what would become the outcome of the Soviet attempt at a worker state.

What makes Wilde an even more essential choice for any course on literature is his genius. While there may be many talented writers from which to select, arguably few displayed the wit and genius, the obvious superior intellect, that Wilde frequently emanated, and which is so extensively documented.

Take, for example, Wilde's final exam at Trinity College. He was told to translate a passage from the Old Testament of the Bible into English from Greek. After two to three minutes, the professors declared that his translation was extremely satisfactory, upon which Wilde evidently remarked, "Please let me go on. I am so anxious to see how it comes out." (Fisher, 1996.)

When his sister died, he composed this poem for her funeral: "Tread lightly, she is near, under the snow. Speak gently, she can hear the lilies grow. All her bright golden hair, tarnished with rust. She that was young and fair, fallen to dust. Lily-like, white as snow, she hardly knew she was a woman, so sweetly she grew. Coffin board, heavy stone, lie on her breast. I vex my heart alone, she is at rest. Peace, peace, she cannot hear lyre or sonnet. All my life's buried here, heap earth upon it." (Fisher, 1996.) This masterful, sad verse (entitled "Requiescat,") was written by Wilde just after his sister's death- when Wilde was 13 years old!

A reading of "The Happy Prince" would surely benefit a reader in terms of either style or content. Its flow is again flawlessly smooth; the reader becomes immediately engrossed, the plot unfolds slowly toward a climax, and a complex, yet beautiful resolution, or conclusion. The structure of the story, the choice of vocabulary, and its fundamental message about tolerating the powerful and their abuses of power, make for substantial discussion. Again, however, this fairy tale, or short story, is not short enough. Moreover, doing justice to the background of Oscar Wilde, as with Nathaniel Hawthorne, would take considerable time, as both biographies would be important in fully comprehending their work (the instructor seldom focused on the backgrounds of authors in the course, so as to spend more time on the language learning aspects of the lessons. One exception to this was a presentation of considerable length done on Mark Twain, whose complexity and ostensible contradictions merited insight into his background.)

3. "The Lady with the Dog" by Anton Chekhov was yet another selection in the original syllabus that regrettably could not be covered. As was the case with Wilde, understanding Chekhov's background is essential to comprehending the empathy with which he treated people. (He worked principally as a physician, not a writer, throughout his life.) His development of characters in his stories, this one in particular, is worthy of discussion and analysis. Studying the characters in this story leads to a full understanding of many aspects in the story: marriage, religion, race, gender, fate, etc. In fact, the story affords much in the way of discussion concerning opportunities not seized in one's life, or the concept of living a hidden life within one's surface existence. Literary elements such as symbolism and figurative language are also employed in

his works, making this tale a superb choice. Length, again, and complexity, were influential in leading the instructor to give up this important work.

4. "Peace" by Max Apple was to be the final story in the course. Written in the late 1980s, it was to be the most modern of all the selections. In terms of content, it was probably the easiest to discuss, given its modern setting and the familiarity of the characters. As a story with a wonderfully woven structure and flow, it was to serve as a summary of total effect in storytelling. However, the story lacked some essential elements. Furthermore, for proper impact, it needed to be divided into two parts so that students could predict the outcome, or resolution, which is one with a delightful twist. Time did not permit this, but the instructor urges any teacher of literature to consider using this fast-paced, upbeat, humorous tale as a fine example of masterful storytelling, and a work highly representative of its age.

This list is not by any means exhaustive. These were not the only stories that appeared in the original syllabus, but just examples of some that would certainly prove effective and instrumental in any course involving literary analysis or discussion. In retrospect, the syllabus was decidedly overly ambitious, but one that would have proven effective if broken into proper parts.

THE ACTUAL SYLLABUS

The actual syllabus involved stories that could be read either at one sitting, yet ironically, the students seldom read a story at one sitting. Rather, the stories were short enough to be read in one sitting but they were comfortably divided into short parts so that they could be discussed in class (the first part) and then finished manageably at home. The stories had to be called "Story 1," "Story 2," etc., so as to prevent the students from reading the entire works on the Internet, which is a danger in such a course. Most short stories can be found on the Internet, free of charge; this proved helpful in terms of gathering materials for the class, but it was a weak point in terms of content, as the titles could not be used to predict or discuss the content of the story, thereby robbing the students of a useful measure in previewing a work.

The theme of the first class, in addition to providing background information and an overview of the course, was entitled "Everyday Reading vs. Reading for Depth." It focused primarily on the students' English skills. The first paragraphs of many news articles were given to the students, and they had to obtain this basic information from the paragraphs: "Who? What? When? Where?" After that, they matched headlines to opening news story paragraphs.

This involved, of course, reading *for information*. The students were engaged in a challenging activity- reading a newspaper in English- which is still thought to be an everyday activity of sorts, despite the indisputable desiccation of the newspaper industry worldwide. Skills such as skimming and scanning are used to achieve the objective: To acquire information quickly from a news source.

In the second stage of this introductory activity, students read this paragraph:

(EXAMPLE)

TASK: *Write a topic sentence for this paragraph.*

_____ . First, smash three medium-sized bananas in a large bowl. Mix them with one cup of flour, two-thirds of a cup of brown sugar, a half teaspoon of baking soda, and two teaspoons of baking powder. Add a half teaspoon of salt if you'd care to. Next, add two tablespoons of milk, a third of a cup of softened butter, and two eggs to the mixture. Blend them thoroughly. After that, add 3/4 of a cup of flour and a cup of nuts. If you want to do so, you can add a chopped up bar of bitter chocolate to the mixture. In fact, you can add just about anything you want to add, as this is your show. Everyone eating this delightful baked good will think that you slaved in the kitchen for a long time, so it is better not to confess that even a five-year-old could make this. Making this "bread" is a piece of cake.

Again, the point was that the students were reading for information; they were reading a *recipe*.

This activity served to set the mood perfectly for Part II of the lesson: How reading in depth differs from everyday reading. In other words, how do we read fiction, and then reflect upon it to glean meaning and insight.

This activity was also good for the students in that they could see the structure of a typical paragraph (do not forget that this was intended as a course for learning English, not only literature.) A solid topic sentence in a process-oriented paragraph would then be supported by the rest of the sentences in the paragraph. As can be seen, the paragraph ends with a "punch" in its conclusion, while also restating, more or less, the topic sentence.

In other words, this paragraph, used to illustrate a critical point about reading for information vs. reading for depth, was an excellent example of concise paragraph writing and therefore of intrinsic value to the students.

Following this, the class took a break and ate the banana bread that was described/explained in the paragraph. (This was yet another objective in writing this paragraph... to share the recipe of that week's break-time sweet prepared by the instructor.)

To start the second part of the first lesson, the instructor read the recipe to the students in a dramatic fashion. A news paragraph about Warren Buffett and Bill Gates was chosen, and read with rising/falling intonation, varied volume, and exaggerated emotion to demonstrate a point: These pieces of writing were merely for getting information. Once that is accomplished, the writing is of little lasting value.

STORY SELECTIONS FOR THE ACTUAL COURSE

The first story in the course, a quickly chosen substitute for "The Most Dangerous Game," was called "A Secret for Two." Note that this tale was selected mainly for its brevity and richness in terms of style. In other words, all of the basics involving short story analysis (setting, theme, characterization, flow, and symbolism could be discussed based on this story.)

After reading the first part at home, the instructor used a variation of a well-known game-like activity called "Who Can?" in the second lesson to check the students' attention to details. As can be expected, much of the detail was forgotten or ignored, so the game served as a thorough refresher

of the content. (The instructor used another variation of this technique when discussing short stories in lessons at the University of Tsukuba years earlier; the original approach had been used at junior high school to quiz students on reading passages many years before.)

The activity is conducted in the following manner. The class is divided into groups. The instructor then drills questions at the students concerning the story, and if a student can answer, he or she says, "I can!" Then he or she answers, receiving one point for saying "I can!" and another if the question is answered correctly. (From the second week on, the students were much better prepared in terms of content; it would seem that they began reviewing the stories before coming to class thereafter.)

Here are some sample questions from the game:

1. Where does the story take place? (Montreal)
2. Who is the main character in the story? (Pierre Dupin)
3. What does Pierre do for a living? (milk delivery)
4. Which company does he work for? (Provinciale Milk Company)
5. How long has he been working there? (30 years)
6. What does he look like? (white moustache, limp, stiff, cane)
7. To which street does Pierre deliver milk? (Prince Edward Street)
What covers Prince Edward Street? (cobblestones)
8. What is the street like? (small, four blocks long, cul de sac)
9. What is his horse's name? (Joseph)

(NOTE: The answers to the questions appear inside of the parentheses.)

This activity focuses on listening and speaking. It is both receptive and productive, though little attention is given to grammar and syntax. Following this, however, the instructor wished to have the students write, yet another productive skill, so the class engaged in freeze stories. The freeze story format was as follows:

(EXAMPLE)

FREEZE STORY: A Conclusion

Let's continue the story and work toward a finish.

Start writing when Mr. Juppe says "go." When he says FREEZE, pass the story to the next person, who should try to continue the story from that point. Do not write more; when you hear FREEZE, pass the paper at once, even if you are in the middle of a sentence.

TITLE: (Please make a title for this story; do *not* do this until the story is finished, however)

The president told Jacques that it was time for Pierre to stop working. He said that Pierre could retire with a full salary because no one had ever complained about his work.

The class was divided into two groups so that those in the northern sector of the room (six students) were working on one set of stories, while the other group was making a set in the southern

sphere of the room. What follows are two examples of the stories that the students came up with.

(SAMPLE ONE)

NORTH (No title)

The president told Jacques that it was time for Pierre to stop working. He said that Pierre could retire with a full salary because no one had ever complained about his work. When Pierre heard that he was about to retire, he thought he couldn't part with his lovely horse Joseph. So he asked Joseph, "What are you going to do?" The horse neighed softly and Joseph smiled. They understood each other and Pierre replied, "OK. I will obey your policy, but if you go away, I'd like to work a lighter job."

We don't know what happened to that poor horse. It's a secret. Only Professor Juppe knows it.

COMMENT: I suggest this title: "A Secret for Three"

(NOTE: "I" refers to the author here.)

(SAMPLE TWO)

SOUTH "A Happy Couple"

The president told Jacques that it was time for Pierre to stop working. He said that Pierre could retire with a full salary because no one had ever complained about his work. Jacques was delighted and told the amazing news to Pierre immediately. But Pierre shook his head. "I don't want to quit the job. This is my life work. And Joseph is my best friend. Please don't take him away. I can't. I want to work throughout my whole life."

And Joseph thought the same way. But soon they changed their minds. They wanted to have a lot of money. They made a plan to build a rich house.

As one can tell from reading these two samples, the students enjoyed predicting the conclusion, most of which were markedly different from the actual conclusion. Yet the students demonstrated an ability to strive for climax and resolution, making for an interesting discussion on *how* to tell a story, a skill which is helpful for anybody in a variety of situations, such as with children.

Moreover, this approach is effective as a teaching activity in Japan because students who might be reluctant or shy can "hide" their work. In other words, because they are passing the stories, it is difficult to know who wrote which parts, especially if the activity is done at the END of the class. The instructor then collects the stories, types them, and the following week, they read and vote on which story was the best in terms of either style or content.

In order to focus on the development of language skills, the following vocabulary exercise was used in this particular class. Note that the approach to vocabulary differed on a weekly basis so that the students could enjoy some diversity in their activities.

(EXAMPLE)

DETAILS: What Can You Remember?

“A Secret for Two”

DIRECTIONS: *Which words from the story complete the sentences? Most of these are very descriptive words; if you cannot remember the exact word, use a word that logically finishes the sentence.*

1. The snow _____ like a million diamonds piled together.
HINT: shining brightly
2. “Take today off,” Jacques said, but Pierre was already _____ off down the street.
HINT: walking uncertainly, unsteadily
3. There was a warning yell from the driver of a _____ truck that was coming fast.
4. The eyes were mirroring the _____ that was in Pierre’s soul.
5. Pierre was _____ at the thought of not driving Joseph every day.

Using their dictionaries and memories, the students tried to come up with the exact words from the text. Most of them could not, but that is immaterial. The objective of the activity is to have the students generate scores of good, descriptive words, which did happen in this particular instance.

Yet another activity that focused on descriptive adjectives was this: The students wrote adjectives to describe an item within a certain category. For example, the categories were a relative, a food, a drink, a classmate, a celebrity, a song, your town, etc. The example given was one of the classmates; a gentleman named Mr. Nakagawa.

NAKAGAWA

N = nice A = amiable K = knowledgeable A = astute G = generous
A = athletic-looking W = wise A = ageless

In other words, the adjectives describe the item chosen for that category.

The students’ answers were very interesting, in that they used a wide variety of adjectives. The instructor prepared their answers in the form of a scrambled quiz.

EX. obedient, devoted, good

ANIMAL: _____

It is easy to guess that this answer would be “dog.” All of the adjectives describe a person’s typical image of a dog.

EX. simple, popular, amusing, agreeable, tasty

FOOD: _____

Could you ascertain that the answer was “pasta”? (Unscrambled from S/P/A/A/T.) It might be difficult for one to think of pasta as amusing, but in this way, the students generated scores of adjectives, and could practice using them in an enjoyable activity of a game-like quality.

PRESENTATIONS

The course involved numerous presentations by the instructor dealing with understanding literature, the backgrounds of authors, etc. For example, at times, it was important to discuss an author's background, as was done with Mark Twain. However, the most frequent presentations involved explanations on elements of understanding short stories. For example, one was done on narration, and how the choice of first and third person narration affects a story in so many ways. Another was done on characterization, showing how a good character is created and developed.

What follows is material used during the main presentation, which was grounded in literature, and which was used in a unit on paraphrasing. Again, this was a skill deemed less important for literary understanding, and more critical to the charges as students of a foreign language, English.

(EXAMPLE)

PARAPHRASING

From Poems

"We are ships that pass in the night, and speak each other in passing, only a signal shown, and a distant voice in the darkness; so on the ocean of life, we pass and speak one another, only a look and a voice, then darkness again and a silence."

1. Who wrote this?
2. Which poem is it from?
3. Can you explain it in your own words? (In other words, simplify it.)

From Novels

"The road now stretched across open country, and it occurred to me- not by way of protest, not as a symbol, or anything like that, but merely as a novel experience- that since I had disregarded all laws of humanity, I might as well disregard the rules of traffic as well. So I crossed to the left side of the highway and checked the feeling, and the feeling was good. It was a pleasant diaphragmal melting... all this enhanced by the thought that nothing could be nearer to the elimination of basic physical laws than deliberately driving on the wrong side of the road. In a way, it was a very spiritual itch. Gently, dreamily, not exceeding twenty miles an hour, I drove on the queer mirror side. Traffic was light. Cars that now and then passed me on the side I had abandoned to them honked at me brutally. Cars coming toward me wobbled, swerved, and cried out in fear. Presently I found myself approaching populated places. Passing through a red light was like a sip of forbidden Burgundy when I was a child."

1. Which novel is this from?
2. What is the narrator describing?
3. What is a simile he uses in his description?

Meanwhile Brodsky continued his slow progress, ignoring all of the commotion around him.

It looked at first as though he were being borne aloft by the crowd, but as he came closer I saw he was walking by himself with the aid of a crutch. There was something about this crutch that made me look at it more closely and I saw that it was in fact an ironing board that Brodsky was holding, vertically and folded, under his armpit.

As I stood watching this spectacle, people seemed one by one to notice me and fall respectfully silent, so that the closer the crowd came, the more quiet it grew. The surgeon, however, continued to shout:

“Mr. Brodsky! Your body has had a very severe shock. I really must insist that you sit down and relax!”

1. Which novel is this from?
2. Summarize this scene in simpler words.

The first is a poem by Longfellow, which is rich in symbolism and ideal for paraphrasing. The second is a passage from *Lolita* in which the main character describes driving the wrong way down a highway, or expressway. The third is a passage from *The Unconsoled*, by Kazuo Ishiguro, a very popular, contemporary writer. The students were going to explain this paragraph, or re-write it, in easier English. Due to time considerations, however, it was not used. Again, a sub-objective of this activity was to introduce the students to a popular, contemporary author in the English-speaking world, one with which they were likely to be unfamiliar.

The following activity was done with the students following a discussion on metaphor and simile. The instructor used examples written by the students in a class exercise to practice paraphrasing.

(EXAMPLE)

YOUR METAPHORS AND SIMILES: Paraphrasing

DIRECTIONS: *Read the metaphor or simile. Then paraphrase the sentence in your own words. For the sentences in the bottom part, try to explain the metaphor or simile in your own words.*

1. My cat is a *yakimo*.
Paraphrase: _____.
2. A test is an injection.
Paraphrase: _____.
3. A mother is the sun.
Paraphrase: _____.
4. Life is like a balloon.
Paraphrase: _____.

This activity was extremely enjoyable for the participants, in the instructor's opinions. The students wrote metaphors, similes, and hyperbole for homework, following examples given by the instructor. The instructor then assembled their work on one sheet and allowed them to paraphrase, in

simpler English, the metaphors and similes. For example, “My cat is cuddly, and always presses her warm body against me to keep me warm.” This is the idea one is to glean from a *yakiimo*, or baked sweet potato.

Other activities focusing on paraphrasing involved explaining difficult terms in Japanese. Here were some examples.

(EXAMPLE)

DESCRIBING: Things Japanese

Have you ever had a difficult time explaining something Japanese in English? Let’s practice today. You have to describe your Japanese term in English, but you may not use ANY Japanese words. Try to describe and explain your item entirely in English.

Do not use your dictionaries, either. Try to describe or explain this in your own words.

YOUR ITEM:

YOUR DESCRIPTION (remember, NO Japanese words allowed!)

PART II. GUESSING

- | | | | |
|----|-----|-----|-----|
| 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. |
| 5. | 6. | 7. | 8. |
| 9. | 10. | 11. | 12. |

Each worksheet had a different item written on it (for example, “*kakigori*”, “*fuurin*”, “*noren*”, “*otoshidama*”, “*mononoaware*”, etc.) The participants were given a few minutes to write a definition, using no Japanese words at all. The others had to listen and guess what each person was describing.

This was, of course, good practice for explaining those difficult-to-translate terms that one frequently comes across in Japanese.

Yet a final, and enjoyable paraphrasing activity, involved reading out definitions from an English-English dictionary. For example, “XXXXXX is a hole in a tooth or between two surfaces.” The students then guess what “XXXXXX” is.

The educational logic behind such activities should not be very difficult to discern. The instructor hoped to touch upon all of the macro skills (i.e., reading, writing, speaking, listening) in conducting these activities, yet sought to base them in literature. Since most of the definitions are paraphrased (i.e., little Japanese was used in conducting vocabulary exercises), this is in essence an ongoing activity. Below is an example of a typical vocabulary homework activity.

(EXAMPLE)

VOCABULARY REVIEW: October 18, 2010

DIRECTIONS: *Without looking at your notes or prints from last week, try to complete as many of the blanks below as you can. The first letter of each word has been given to you as a hint.*

1. It hasn't rained for three weeks. This is the worst d_____ I can remember.
2. The number of t_____ in China is growing quickly. There are more than 100,000 millionaires there already.
3. Drew's father donated money to our university so that a new sports center could be built. He is such a p_____ person. He is always giving away money to help others.
4. Because the baseball game had just ended at Tokyo Dome, h_____ of people headed for the Marunouchi Line.

(NOTE: The answers are "drought," "tycoons," "philanthropic," and "hordes.")

While these might be very difficult for you, a reader unacquainted with the course reading material, it served as a good review of new vocabulary learned in the stories and exercises.

Occasionally, the vocabulary exercises were of an easier nature, with four choices given.

(SAMPLE, December 6)

PART I. MULTIPLE CHOICE

1. Mr. Nakayama is such a charming, sophisticated person. Not only does he dress well and speak politely, but his manners are _____.
a. imperative b. impetuous c. impeccable d. imperious

PART II. WORD RECOLLECTION

1. The shoes were as quiet as _____. (Use a word from the story.)

As can be seen from this sample, the level of the vocabulary being studied is high. In Part II, the students are working with similes and metaphors, figurative language, again.

Yet another presentation focused on third-person versus first-person narration, and the benefits of using both. It involved analyzing a paragraph from a first-person narration, and then shifting it to third (the instructor's interpretation) to show changes in content and style. The same was done with a third-person narrative; it was shifted to first to show how such a transition could reduce the effectiveness of the story.

Then, the second selection in the course was made. This was called "The Blue Bouquet", a very short story penned by Octavio Paz and chosen not only for its brevity, but for its rich, descriptive writing, elaborate in its description of setting, peppered with symbolism, and above all, narrated in the first person.

"Suddenly the moon appeared from behind a black cloud, lighting a white wall that was crumbled in places. I stopped, blinded by such whiteness. Wind whistled slightly. I breathed the air of the tamarinds. The night hummed, full of leaves and insects. Crickets bivouacked in the tall grass. I

raised my head: up there too the stars had set up camp. I thought the universe was a vast system of signs, a conversation between giant beings." (Howe, p. 163-164.)

The contrast between the details and the beauty at the start of this story, and the climax, were a bit abrupt for the students. As with the first story, this was divided into two, and called "Story Number 2." Not one of the students was able to predict the twisted, morbid climax that was to follow (for the sake of anyone reading this paper, I will refrain from telling you any more about it.)

Lastly, alliteration and assonance, two concepts important in literature, came up during a class discussion. The instructor decided to just touch upon this, since it is a literary concept, and of less value to a course in which a primary aim is improving one's English.

THE REMAINDER OF THE SYLLABUS

What follows is a list of the other stories that were read over the course of the term.

1. "Count Dracula" This story, by Woody Allen, was read largely to focus on setting and atmosphere, as well as to see how dialogue could reveal much about both characters and plot.
2. "After Twenty Years" This focused largely on structure and irony. Foreshadowing was an important element as well. It was written by O'Henry.
3. "The Dinner Party" This story is rich in description, and provides for an interesting discussion on theme, implied and explicit.
4. "The Sparrow." This story proved useful in discussing implied and explicit themes in a story as well.
5. "The Sound of Summer Running" This story is good for analyzing characters. It also provides the reader with an interesting look at themes, implied and explicit.

For the final story, conclusions were written and submitted. By the end of the course, the students had developed a considerable level of familiarity with one another. They did not have any qualms about submitting and sharing such assignments by that stage of the course.

The last story read in the course was called "Man of the House." It was chosen for its comprehensive, total effect. In other words, just about every element of a short story could be found in this little-known-work. Also, as an unpublished work, it could not be located on the Internet, so the story could be neatly divided into two parts and discussed for setting, characterization, plot, alliteration, descriptive writing, figurative language, irony, and more. Two endings had been written for this story. The instructor included both, and then during discussion, it was revealed that the students had not particularly cared for the second ending.

Essentially, there was a cultural element at play. In the original story, a dog saves a widow's son from a bear attack; indebted to the dog, which she had never liked, the dog winds up sleeping on the mother's bed for the rest of its life. That the dog had "won" the woman over and wound up as

the man of the house was satisfying to the participants.

In the alternative version that was later prepared for a different publication, the narrator (a young girl) has grown up at the very end of the added conclusion. She is talking with her younger sister, and the little sister informs her that just after the dog died, the mother took elaborate measures in carrying out the dog's funeral. Furthermore, it turned out that the mother immediately went to the town pound to get a new dog the following day.

This, too, was ironic, given the level of contempt for the dog at the start of the story. (One could argue this mother, a seemingly flat character, turned out to be a round character: She did something totally unexpected and unpredictable, given the character as the readers knew it.)

The Japanese students were uncomfortable with this ending. Intended to show that the woman had come to love the dog so much that she needed a replacement upon its death, they took it to show that the woman cared little for the original dog. Within one day, she had already gotten a new dog, hence diminishing or erasing the memory of the first dog. The feeling seemed to be unanimous: Grieving, even for an animal, should not be ephemeral, even if it be ostensibly fleeting.

CONCLUSION

The course proved a resounding success. There was virtually no absenteeism, and the evaluation sheets showed uniform "1" marks (excellent) in terms of preparation, content, and other elements. It should be noted that though the course was actually 90 minutes in length, it frequently ran 15–20 minutes over, which was not a point of criticism from the participants, but rather, one of seeming satisfaction.

In addition to focusing on language development, particularly in terms of acquisition of vocabulary and expressions, it was hoped that the instructor could help students to appreciate short story reading more in the future. The following list of items that received considerable attention and discussion were as follows:

1. Predicting/skimming (in order to preview a work).
2. Attention to detail.
3. Figurative language (e.g., the simile and metaphor).
4. Identifying themes, both implicit and explicit.
5. Paraphrasing and describing.
6. Irony and foreshadowing.
7. Narration.
8. Setting/atmosphere/mood.
9. Conclusion writing.

Though "classics" such as "The Lady and the Dog," "Young Goodman Brown," and "The Tell-tale Heart" would prove interesting and insightful in teaching such a course, an instructor may need to find works of a shorter, simpler nature so that the students can enjoy learning about literature, yet also develop their English skills through activities and material that are within their grasp, or

proficiency level. This would prove a strong consideration for any instructor contemplating such a course.

As mentioned earlier, the students' insights and impressions were greatly varied and of considerable interest. An instructor should leave ample time for discussion, and consider using two hours per class session rather than 90 minutes.

Finally, such a course, though incredibly time-consuming in terms of preparation, execution, and evaluation, will surely prove more rewarding than a simple language class. As the poet Horace said millennia ago, "the purpose of literature is to delight and instruct." (Krasny, p. 1.) Most certainly, such a course broadens one's scope of life and expands on knowledge in a plethora of respects.

As the instructor pledged in the course description dispatched prior to the start of the course, "What better way to spend a Monday evening?" For the instructor, at least, this proved unwaveringly true.

REFERENCES

Books

- Howe, Irving and Ilana. *Short Shorts: An Anthology of the Shortest Stories*. London: Bantam Books. 1982.
- Cassidy, Jack; Cooper, Eric; DiYanni, Robert; Loxley, R. Brian. *Introducing Literature* (MacMillan Literature Series). Mission Hills: Glencoe. 1991.
- Angeles, Eleanor. *Scope English*. New York: Scholastic Inc. 1990.
- Allen, Woody. *Getting Even*. New York: Vintage Books. 1978.
- Hitchcock, Alfred. *Spellbinders in Suspense*. New York: Random House. 1967.
- Great American Short Stories*.
- Peithman, Stephen. *The Annotated Tales of Edgar Allan Poe*. London: Crown Books. 1987.
- Nabokov, Vladimir. *Lolita*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books. 1955.
- Ishiguro, Kazuo. *The Unconsoled*. New York: Vintage International, 1995.
- Wilde, Oscar. *The Complete Fairy Tales of Oscar Wilde*. London: Signet Classics. 2008.
- Wilde, Oscar. *The Soul of Man under Socialism*. Lexington: Valde Books. 2010.

Magazines

- Apple, Max. "Peace." New York: Harper's Magazine. 1989, February.

Courses

- Spurgin, Timothy. *The Art of Reading*. Chantilly: The Teaching Company. 2009.
- Krasny, Michael. *Masterpieces of Short Fiction*. Chantilly: The Teaching Company. 2008.
- Fisher, John. *Great Writers: Their Lives and Their Works*. Chantilly: The Teaching Company. 1996.