



Teaching English through Short Stories

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Introduction:

Acquiring language basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing are very important in language learning. More sources are available to the learners to improve language skills. Among those, short story is considered a unique literary genre in acquiring the four LSRW skills. Once upon a time, teachers did not use any modern technology or even chalk boards. They simply shared their knowledge through stories. The odds are that our memorable moments, too, have to do with stories not theories or definitions but an unfolding narrative, drama, humor or a personal anecdote shared by the favorite teachers. Generally, the students like short stories and they can actively involve in reading stories. Moreover, short stories have a compact structure and it can be used very effectively in English language teaching and learning. It's readability within a limited period of time, emotional involvement of the students are special features of short stories. English language teachers should allot certain periods to read short stories. As such, this paper deals with the reasons behind using short stories as an effective tool for teaching English.

Why short stories:

The power of stories has been recognized for centuries. Stories are the natural mode of thinking. Before our formal education, we have been learning from Aesop's fables, fairy tales or family history. According to Schank & Abelson (1995), All knowledge comes in the form of stories. Generally, stories are a powerful structure for organizing and transmitting information, and for creating meaning in our lives and environments. Especially, Short stories are practical as their length is long enough to complete in one or two class sessions. They are not complicated for students to work on their own. Moreover, short stories are available according to the different tastes and interests of the students and it can be used with all levels, all ages and all sessions (morning, afternoon and evening classes).

The objectives:

The researcher's main objectives are....

1. To highlight how the four language skills can be developed by the short stories.
2. To explain what type of short stories can be given to high school students.
3. To explain how the students involve in reading short stories.

The scope:

The scope of this research deals with the features of the story as it plays a vital role in developing the language skills of the students. The scope is limited to the story 'His First Flight' by Liam O'Flaherty and 'The Attic' by Satyajit Ray.

The rationale of the selection:

The researcher justifies the selection of the primary source as it is highly valuable to use as a tool for promoting the language skills among the high school students. The researcher feels that the short stories are very interesting to read and the students of all age groups like to listen and read short stories. With the guidance of the teacher, the students can read the short story 'His First Flight'.

Pedagogical elements of short stories:

Pedagogy has three elements:

1. Content:

The researcher has selected the story 'His First flight' and 'The Attic', as the stories have a lot of moral values which are the most important to the high school children.

2. Methodology:

The content of the stories Liam O'Flaherty's His First Flight and Satyajit Ray's The Attic were analyzed thoroughly and the students are asked to involve in various activities under the guidance of the language teacher.

3. Techniques for learning the language:

The researcher tries to improve the language skills through short stories by dividing the pedagogical elements into 4 categories:

1. Activities to improve the vocabulary items of the students.
2. Activities to improve the pronunciation and speaking skills of the students.
3. Activities to improve the grammatical skills of the students.
4. Activities to improve the writing skills of the students.
5. Activities to induce the imagination of the students

Role of the teacher:

The teacher's role is very important in developing the skills in English among the students. In using the short stories to teach English, story selection is the most important role of the teacher. They should guide the students to engage in an effective interpretation. Since the length of the short stories vary, the teacher should choose a story short enough to read within the given period of time. Since the short stories can be read within a certain period of time, the learners can get the feeling of self confidence and achievement. The selection of the story should answer the following questions positively. They are..

1. Is the story fascinating to the students?
2. Is the level of the language suitable?
3. Is it useful to improve the language skills?
4. Is it culturally felicitous?
5. Is it readable within the given period of time?

Spack(1985) suggests the aspect of interest to be considered. According to him, it is important for the teacher to choose stories that would interest students that he/she most likes to read and teach, and that have been made into film to provide visual interpretation. McKay (2001,p.322) and Rivers(1968,p.230) point out that the students read and enjoy a text if the subject matter of the text is relevant to their life experience and interests.

The stories 'His First Flight' and 'The attic' fulfill the expectations of the teachers and the students.

The story "His First Flight"

This story was written by Liam O’Flaherty. It is a story of a young seagull who is afraid of flying. A family of seagulls lived in a ledge. A young seagull is left alone as he is afraid to fly and is one among the slow learners. The young seagull needed motivation. By the way of punishment, his family left him alone on the ledge and flew away. They taunted him for his cowardice and threatened to let him starve. He remained hungry for twenty-four hours and was unable to shed off his fright of flight. He begged his mother to bring him some food.

His mother picked up a piece of fish in her beak and flew across him and stood just in front of him. The piece of fish in her beak was almost very near to the young seagull. Already, the young seagull was mad with hunger. He dived at the fish. The next moment, he found himself falling outwards and downwards into space. Instinctively, he spread his wings and flapped them. He soared upwards and all his fear has gone. It was a joyous moment in his family.

The story “The Attic”:

The story “Attic”:

The ‘Attic’ is a story that represents a child’s psychology with the help of its characters. While returning for their new factory of Deodarganj, the narrator with his friend and business partner Aditya drove along national highway 40 and decided to take the road to the right. The road led to the native place of Aditya at Bramhapur. His father used to be a landlord there. Later, they shifted to start a business in kolkatta. Aditya tried to recollect his old memories. After 29 years, Aditya visited his native village. There, he went to Nagen uncle’s tea shop and had a cup of tea. Mr. Sanyal was there and he loudly recited the poem “panraksa” by Tagore. On hearing the recitation, Aditya’s expression changed. Sasankasanyal was a mysterious person living with his friend Jogesh Kabiraj who had lost his wife and son the previous year. He sold all his lands for his daughter’s marriage and he became a pauper and somewhat crazy due to mental stress. Though he didn’t forget the past memories and possessed high self-esteem and respect, he never failed to pay the bill at that tea stall.

When Aditya came to know the mental condition and sufferings of Mr. Sanyal, Aditya visited his home and gave him 150 rupees. Then, Aditya revealed to the narrator that Mr. Sanyal was a classmate of him. Sanyal had won the poetry reciting competition and that he had taken his silver medal to show it to his father and never returned to Mr. Sanyal.

Sanyal did not accept the money as it will soon be spent and asked for the actual silver medal instead. Aditya respected his demand and after 29 years, the medal was finally restored to its rightful owner “Sriman Sasanka Sanyal”.

Why these stories?

The story “His first flight” teaches self-confidence and courage. It insists on the importance of facing challenges bravely and confidently without fear. The students should have the spirit of never give up attitude to attain a great success in their life. Moreover, the story is very simple, readable and up to the level of high school students. The moral of this story brings a great impact on the children. They can get the life skills.

The story “The Attic” depicts the importance of human values. It’s natural for a human being to make mistakes. When we realize our mistakes, we should try to rectify them. Human values are the virtues that direct us to consider human behavior while we interact with other people. Moreover, the children should get good human values from their childhood itself. This story insists on the same. It was narrated very interestingly. It is worth reading and highly recommended for its moral values. Moreover, Jean Piaget suggests that children think differently than adults. On one hand, a child is simple, pure, full of imagination and energy. On the other side, he is jealous, possessive and egoistic. He wants to excel in all fields and wants to be at the top of the world always, by any means even by hurting others. He can’t accept any defeat. Hence defends his vices by all means. He is not bothered by any crime committed. He is concerned about his prestige in his class and wants to please his friends, teachers and parents.

The attic symbolizes his own empire, his treasure island, his hidden desire for supremacy. As age advances, he can understand his misdeeds and accept his past with grace. By reading and understanding the moral values of the story, the children can have good characters from their childhood itself. It can get a clear picture of the victory. Apart from the language skills, the children can have the right attitude towards others and their life.

Students' comments:

While reading, I was annoyed by the actions of the young seagull and its cowardice. I was much impressed by the efforts of the young seagull's family and how they trained it to get rid of the fear.

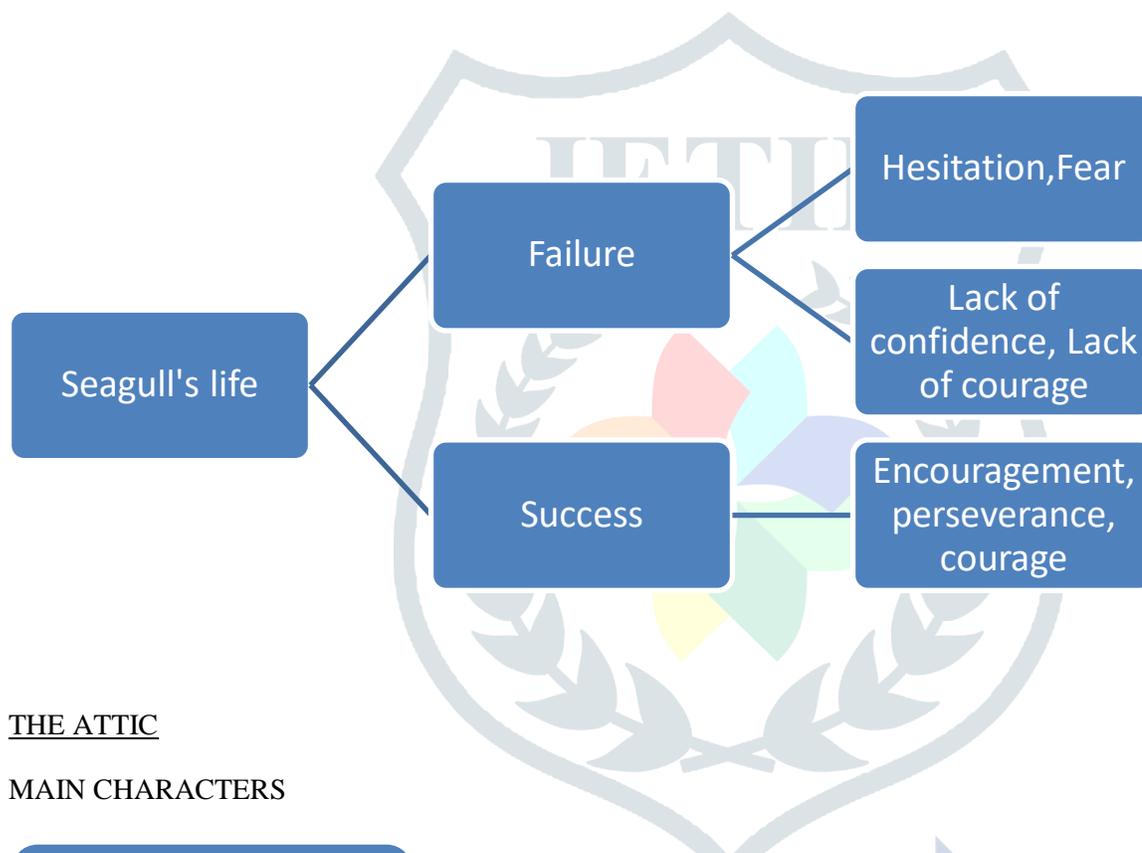
I came to know that all parental acts are for the betterment of their children.

From the story 'The Attic', I came to know the importance of human values. Moreover, it deals directly with human flaws and the power of forgiveness.

Activities:

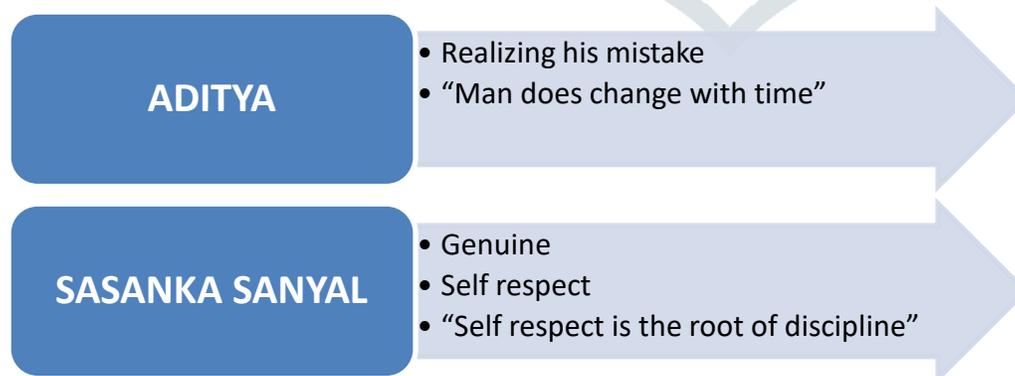
The students are asked to draw a mind map by using the learnt words and the characters of the story.

His first flight



THE ATTIC

MAIN CHARACTERS



Grammar through stories:

Grammar is very important in all forms of communication. The students should learn the grammar item and its usage from their childhood itself. The researcher feels that the children can learn the grammar items easily through short stories. The

teacher can guide the students to find out the grammar items in each and every line of the story. In this story, the students can find the tense forms of the verbs, phrases and clauses, types of sentences and so on. A story provides a realistic context for presenting grammar points and focuses the students' attention easily. Naturally, students like to listen stories, and they remembered long after the lesson is over. Moreover, the stories promote a feeling of well-being and relaxation

Examples:

His first flight

His two brothers and sisters had already flown away(past perfect tense)

Nobody had come near him. (Past perfect tense)

With a loud scream, (phrase) he fell (past tense) outwards and downwards into space. (Simple sentence)

As he passed beneath her, he heard the swish of her wings. (Complex sentence)

The attic

From the story, the students can learn tenses, compound words, conjunctions, phrases and clauses, sentence structures and so on.

Tenses

1. We had reached (past perfect tense) a point where the road bifurcated (past tense).

2. Aditya's father had left(past perfect tense) the ancestral home and moved(past tense) to Kolkata.

3. We were driving (past continuous tense) along National Highway 40.

Simple, complex and compound sentences

Simple sentences:

Examples from the story," The Attic"

1. After about ten minutes, we came to the local school.

2. by my watch, it was 3:30 in the afternoon.

Complex sentences:

1. Though I was a little curious, I didn't ask anything.

2. If we drove ten kilometers along the road that branched off to the right, we would reach Bramhapur.

Compound sentences:

1. He took it from me to show his father and never returned it to me.

2. We got down from the bus and stood in front of the gate (compound sentence)

Thus, the teacher teaches the types of sentences from the story and makes the students find out the different types of sentences from the given story.

Compound words

1. beyond the iron gated were the playing field and the two-storeyed school building.

1. The owner of the tea shop, now over sixty, a little rustic appearance, with his white neatly-combed hair and clean look, was the same as before.
2. His nerves seemed overwrought for some reason.

Like the above examples, the students are insisted to write more compound words on their own

Conjunctions:

Samples from the story:

1. We sat on two tin chairs. There was only one other customer sitting at a corner table, neither eating nor drinking tea, but sitting with his head bent, as though he were sleeping.
2. I would have forgotten that unpleasant incident of my childhood if I could get the medal back. Thus, the students are insisted to find out the grammatical items while reading the story,

Short stories and Language Skills Development:

Short stories are very useful in teaching the four skills to all levels of language proficiency. Murdoch (2002) indicates that “Short stories can, if selected and exploited appropriately, provide quality text content which will greatly enhance English language teaching courses learners at intermediate levels of proficiency” (p.9). According to him, short stories could be very beneficial materials in English language teaching reinforcement by using them in learning activities such as, discussion, writing and acting out dialogues.

A series of activities have been given to the students to develop their skills. A student-centered approach has been presented. This approach provides more opportunities to exhibit their skills.

A. Reading;

Short stories are very useful in improving the proficiency in reading and vocabulary. The following activity has been given to the students.

1. Change the parts of speech of the given words in the chart.

NOUN	VERB	ADJECTIVE	ADVERB
exhaustion		Exhaustive	
Madness	madden		
Perfection			Perfectly

2. The students have been asked to write the meaning of the words given below

Examples:

Trotted-

Gnawed-

Precipice-

Devour-

Bifurcated-

Revive-

Soothing-

Ascertained-

Crumbled-

The teacher asks the students to make sentences on their own. Marks and rewards will be awarded on their best efforts.

B. To improve the writing skills and imagination:

1. The students are insisted to write a similar story on their own. This induces the imagination skill of the students. The best story will be selected and it will be appreciated and awarded during the celebration of the English Literary Association.
2. The students are asked to write a paragraph to explain what you think the young seagull has learnt from the experience.
3. Write review on the story.
4. Write one sentence on the theme of the story.

C. Speaking and listening:

Short story is a powerful motivating source for teaching both speaking and listening. Oral reading, dramatization, role playing and discussion are some effective learning activities. The teacher can use these activities to improve speaking and learning of the students. Asking students to read the given story aloud can develop their speaking as well as listening. It also leads to improving pronunciation.

The following activities have been given to the students

1. The teacher involves the students in story completion. One student starts to narrate the learnt story and the others follow it. Thus, the students complete the story with the moral.
2. The students have been divided into two groups and a debate has been conducted on the stories between them.
3. The teacher insisted one group to tell the new words with correct pronunciation and the other group can tell the meaning/synonym of the words. The winners have been awarded.
4. The students are guided to play the story.
5. The students are asked to narrate their own experiences one by one.

Group projects:

Working together can be a great way for the students to improve the language skills in English. During group activities, the students can eagerly participate in each and every learning activity. Students of varying English levels can work together to support each other, sharing ideas together, learning from one another. Teachers should provide a supportive environment and time for planning and conducting their projects. The students will be divided into four groups and each group will be asked to tell a short story orally. It improves their imagination and speaking skills.

Story analysis activity:

The teacher can make the students get the theme of the story. They can be provided more opportunities to read variety of short stories of various authors. Moreover, the teacher has to inculcate the habit of shared reading. It provides opportunities to read orally in an informal setting. By providing repeating opportunities in reading texts at their appropriate level of reading, the children can develop reading fluency. Meanwhile, they come to know the different cultures and habits of the people around the world. They can get the moral values from their childhood itself and it makes them good citizens.

Conclusion:

Thus, short stories are much useful in language learning. Generally, language teaching in the classroom is the creation of an authentic situation for language. An interesting story encourages the students to read more. The teacher guides the students to select good stories. The good stories do more than create a sense of connection. They build familiarity and

trust, and allow the listener to enter the story where they are, making them more open to learning. Moreover, the students should be provided good libraries in schools and separate periods will be allotted to them to read more.

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