

# A Reader's Companion to the Short Story in English

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**Abstract – While the short story has existed in various forms for centuries, it has particularly flourished during the last hundred years, and especially in recent decades. Though many outstanding novels have been written in the 20th century, most of these writers have also published short fiction. And in many cases, their short stories exhibit a greater degree of coherence and integrity than their longer works. The rise of creative writing programs in the 1960s helped fuel the growth of the short story and brought academic attention to it. So, too, the emergence of multiculturalism encouraged authors of diverse backgrounds to write about their cultures. This reference is a guide to the contemporary English-language short story. Included are alphabetically arranged entries for roughly 50 English-language short story writers from around the world, such as Chinua Achebe, John Barth, Jamaica Kincaid, Salman Rushdie, and Amy Tan. More than half the American writers profiled are from historically marginalized groups, such as Jewish-Americans, African-Americans, and Asian-Americans. Most of these authors have been active since 1960, and they reflect a wide range of experiences and perspectives in their works. Each entry is written by an expert contributor and includes biographical material, a brief review of existing criticism, a lengthier analysis of specific works, and a selected bibliography of primary and secondary sources. The volume begins with a detailed introduction to the short story genre and concludes with an annotated bibliography of major works on short story theory.**

**Keywords:-Short Story, novels, Degree of Coherence, Multiculturalism, Biographical Material.**

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## INTRODUCTION

The short stories you select for your students to read in the Learning English through Short Stories elective module will depend largely on the language and interest level of your students. The Suggested Schemes of Work for the Elective Part of the Three-year Senior Secondary English Language Curriculum (Secondary 4-6) recommends that teachers go over one short story with students at the beginning of the module to highlight the features of a short story, using 'pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities'; students should then 'be encouraged to read a couple of stories' on their own. For the first short story of the module, it is important to select a story that is at the 'instructional level' for the majority of students in the class. An instructional level text is one in which a student is able to read at least 90% of the words accurately and understand no less than 75% of the overall content. If the text is too difficult, the teacher will spend too much time explaining vocabulary and scaffolding student learning. Students will spend too much time focusing on word recognition and will struggle to understand the meaning. To determine whether a particular short story is at the instructional

level for the majority of students in a class, the teacher can conduct a quick reading test with a random sample of 10 students. For the test, the teacher selects one paragraph of roughly 100 words from the short story. Each of the 10 students then meets with the teacher the extraordinary output of short stories in the English-speaking world has led several scholars and critics to suggest that the genre will be recognized as the preeminent form in the twentieth century in the same way that the novel was in the nineteenth. This is not to say that the novel did not have its share of superior practitioners, but in almost every case novelists were or are also short-story writers, and in many cases the short stories in their integrity and coherence are better formed than the novels and likely will be remembered longer—those of Sherwood Anderson, for example, Ernest Hemingway, D. H. Lawrence, Katherine Anne Porter, or Eudora Welty, to name just a few that come to mind.

The stories discussed in this volume were, with one exception, written in the latter half of the twentieth century, most deriving from 1960 to the present. This was the time when degrees in creative writing

multiplied (exponentially, I sometimes think) until almost every English department in the academy established an M.F.A. and/or Ph.D. program in the field. Writing workshops punctuated summer sessions around the world. In these programs, those interested in fiction mainly pursued their interests in writing short stories since novels are not easy to handle in workshops and are seldom undertaken. It is not surprising, then, that many an emerging writer's first publication is a collection of short stories. Thus the university was not only hiring writers and producing writers skilled in the form but also training readers. In this way, the academy created a reading public knowledgeable in how to read a short story—a necessary prerequisite, as Poe first declared when he suggested that readers need to read "the tale" with an art "kindred" to that employed by the writers themselves.

The latter half of the twentieth century also saw an important move toward diversity in the literary canon. In fact, never has there been so sweeping a change in the canon common to the English-speaking world as the one that took place in the last thirty or so years of the twentieth century. Certainly previous eras evidenced their share of changes, but not without battle.

Due to the potential of literature to express both cultural values and universal human values, its study can promote internal as well as international communication. The literary reader's reactive (or rather, 'co-creative') role and the imaginative involvement engendered by this role encourage a dynamic interaction between reader, text and external world. Today, with the interdisciplinary outlook in the academics, there is a renewed concentration on the use of literature in the classroom. Research into the interconnectivity of the short story teaching and the acquisition of L2 reading and writing skills supports the positive impact of the use of the short story and brief narrative texts in improving learners' reading and writing skills speaking and listening skills. The short story's distinctive features, i.e., its brevity, modernity, and variety make it appealing and interesting to language learners. When the short story is chosen based on the students' level of English proficiency, it can offer them adequate linguistic, intellectual, and emotional involvement and enrich their learning experience. Thus, this paper proposes that the short story can provide ESL learners with a suitable study resource which is both delightful and instructive to improve their linguistic proficiency and writing skills. Consequently, the researcher aims to put forward a variety of strategies to make the teaching of the short story enjoyable and an academically enriching experience. These strategies include the design and implementation of motivation building techniques which facilitate overall reading comprehension, written skills, and enrich their cultural orientation.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The interaction and mutual, reciprocal, collaboration of literature and language teaching has been the subject of interest to many foreign language teaching researchers, especially in the 20th century. Claire and Oliver Kramsch, in their investigation into the historical background of the use of literature in language teaching, assert that:

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, literature has been given many purposes in language study. It has been used for the aesthetic education of the few (1910s), for literacy of the many (1920s), for moral and vocational uplift (1930s-1940s), for ideational content (1950s), for humanistic inspiration (1960s-1990s), and finally for providing an 'authentic' experience of the target culture (1980s-1990s). ...literature has consistently provided the cultural backbone and, very often the intellectually legitimation for the teaching of foreign languages. Using literature as a vehicle for the teaching of a second or foreign language has proved very beneficial to the EFL and ESL students' learning experience. Notable researchers such as Susan Louise Stern (1985), Yorio (1971), McKinley (1974), Walsleben (1975), Gorman (1979), and Povey (1979) have all attested to the idea of the effectiveness of the implementation of literature in the language class. Povey, thus, proposes that, "Literature gives evidence of the widest variety of syntax, the richest variation of vocabulary discrimination. It provides examples of the language employed at its most effective, subtle, and suggestive"

**Christine Gomez (2008):** Mukherjee's mention of the article 'The World According to Hsu' by Kenneth J. Hsu in this story is only to propagate the idea that, "There is perhaps a longing for the world according to Hsu, a one world free from cultural collisions, dilemmas and separation".

It is on this basis that her first two novels, *The Tiger's Daughter* (1972) and *Wife* (1975), can be separated from the rest of her work. Her first volume of short stories, *Darkness* (1985), negotiates the ideological divide between these periods; the four stories ('The World According to Hsu', 'Isolated Incidents', 'Courtly Vision' and 'Hindus') can be described as belonging to the early phase.

**Gillian Beer (2009)** in her article, 'Discourses of the Island', points out that 'the emphasis in plate tectonics is on fracture, drift, the lateral slide of plates against or alongside each other'. Beer suggests that 'the earth, rather than being thought of as one rigid, stable body with fixed continents and permanent ocean basins, is now considered to be broken into several large plates and a few smaller ones, which move very slowly and then collide with or jostle one another'.

**Times Book (2009):** Mukherjee systematically articulates for the first time the features of the new America that her writings have helped to inaugurate.

**Garvin (2013)** drew inspiration from **Hanauer's (2010)** poetry-as-research methodology in four English Composition research classes in China. Garvin's context, in fact, was identical to the one described in this present paper. Garvin's (2013) study aimed "to develop English writing skills, provide space for individual expressions of L2 [second language] identity and voice, and potentially, contribute to L2 writing research" (p. 77). In interviews, learners reported (a) more confidence to write in English, (b) more positive attitudes toward writing English poetry, (c) a renewed interest in Chinese history, (d) greater ability to use a wider range of English vocabulary, (e) more sensitivity to phonemes in the English language, and (f) a better understanding of poetic conventions common in English poetry

(Garvin, 2013, p. 88). Garvin's learners also reported being less inhibited to write in English.

Also drawing on **Hanauer's (2010)** pedagogical and analytical approach to poetry writing, Iida (2012) examined how personally meaningful haiku affected argument papers of twenty-three Japanese learners of English. Through an analysis of pre- and post-arguments, haiku manuscripts, and interview transcripts, Iida found learners wrote more words, wrote more fluently, and wrote more directly after the haiku intervention. Iida's analysis of interview data found, like Garvin (2013), that writers reported lower inhibition to express their thoughts in English.

## ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY

In class, the instructor explains that in literary fiction, modes of fiction, when analyzed, often reveal more about the story's meaning and its characters' conflicts. Learners spend half an hour carrying out the following task: In pairs, go through the story to decide where modes of characterization appear. After learners have gone through the story, the instructor hands out markers or crayons. Different colors represent different modes. The instructor models how to code. Sometimes, more than one mode will appear in one section. After modeling, the instructor asks learners to carry out the following task: Use colored markers or crayons to code occurrences of modes. For instance, description (blue), action (red), exposition (yellow), thought (green), and dialog (pink). No sentence should go unmarked.

### Character Analysis

The instructor gives the following prompt:

In pairs, create an artistic portrait of one of the characters in the story. You may use pencil and paper, crayons and markers, or an online tool. Pay attention to how the modes of characterization can be artfully conveyed. The point is for learners to work together to think about literary fiction in a multimodal way. Some learners in my class seemed embarrassed and were not sure what to do. Soon, however, groups lost themselves in the playfulness of the activity. After learners have created artistic portraits, it is time for individual writing: Reflect on the table of modes of characterization. Now, draft a working thesis statement that explains some aspect of the story you did not realize before. The final step of this sequence asks learners to analyze themselves as if they were a character in a work of fiction. Past research on storytelling in general has shown the benefits of narrative writing, such as: (a) English-learning immigrants were able to explore past, present, and future selves through stories (Early & Norton, 2012; Lee, 2013); (b) classrooms that allowed storytelling to emerge encouraged learners to place themselves in empowering agentive positions in life-history narratives (Early & Norton, 2012; Simpson, 2011); (c) English language learners (ELL) have resisted dominant linear narratives to express the complexity of hybrid identities (Ghisso & Low, 2013); (d) co-construction of narratives has encouraged more vivid tellings and rememberings (Holmes & Marra, 2011); (e) narrative writing has encouraged language development for expressive purposes (Holmes & Marra, 2011; Ko, 2010; Nicholas, Rossiter, & Abbott, 2011); (f) narrative writing has raised genre awareness (Nicholas, Rossiter, & Abbott, 2011); (g) narratives have enabled ELLs to create a sense of community (Nicholas, Rossiter, & Abbott, 2011); and (h) ELLs have reported expanding identity and viewpoint-taking through storytelling (Stillar, 2013). This lesson seeks to draw on these affordances as learners write about themselves with a keener awareness of the fictive modes of characterization now available to them. Accordingly, the instructor will give the following prompt: Analyze yourself: your description, action, thoughts, exposition (or what you can tell us about your history), and dialog.

## SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The Short Story in English is an open access journal that provides rapid publication (quarterly) of articles in all areas Related to English Language and Literature of the subject. For nearly a century now, the periodical English Language and Literature (Collectively English studies) has been one of the defining publications in the field of 'English'. Unique in the range and quality of its coverage, it attracts contributions from leading scholars worldwide on the language, literature and culture of the English-speaking world from the Anglo-Saxon period to the



present day. The foremost position of English Studies in many of these areas is widely recognized by its international readership. Literatures written in the English language, English linguistics, English sociolinguistics, translation studies and related areas, African literatures, literature appreciation, cultural studies, literary styles, Asian English's as well as Asian literatures in English, including Asian diasporic literature and Asian literatures in translation, the connection between stylistics, critical theory, linguistics and literary criticism, and their applications in teaching to native and non-native speaking students, CALL; CLT and TBLT; Computational Linguistics; Corpus linguistics; Discourse and Inter language Pragmatics; Discourse and Organization; ELT Materials Development and Evaluation; English Globalization; English Language Teacher Education; English Language Testing and assessment, ESP and EAP; Ethnicity, Nationalism and Language; Gender and Sexism in Language; Heritage Language; Intercultural Studies and Multiculturalism; Language and Identity; Language Planning Policy, Literary Theory and Cultural Studies; Media and Language; Research on English Language Teaching/Learning; Second Language Acquisition; Secondary and Tertiary English Education Socio-cultural Factors and English Education; Syllabus Design and Curriculum Development; Teaching English to Young Learners; Translation Studies; Variation and Language Change, All research areas related to English language and literature are well come to the publications.

## DISCUSSION

Using literature in the language classroom leads the learners to become better readers. In addition, as Knutson maintains, "drawing explicit attention to the interactive nature of the reading process provides a natural introduction to the theoretical issues of readability, comprehension, and interpretation, preparing students who plan to pursue advanced study for the increasingly important reader-based focus of current literary criticism". Susan Louise Stern in her Ph.D. dissertation entitled, "Teaching Literature in ESL/EFL: An Integrative Approach," comments on the relevance of the structure and content of literary texts for language learning purposes: "those works that do contain complex structures give students the opportunity to practice and test their ability to unravel them. As with vocabulary, the context of the work gives readers the necessary cues to figure out the structures on their own". Among the literary forms, indeed, the short story is an engaging literary genre and can therefore be utilized for language learning purposes. Almost all modern short stories have the following unique characteristics which make them especially suitable to be used in reading comprehension classes: Universality, Non-triviality, Personal relevance, Variety, Interest, Economy and Suggestive Power, Ambiguity; moreover, each learner's interpretation has validity and an almost infinite fund of interactive discussion is guaranteed. The short story creates the tension

necessary for a genuine exchange of ideas in class discussions. In addition, the short story pushes students out of a passive reading state into a personal connection with the text-and then beyond, extending the connection to other texts and to the world outside of school. Closely related to the issue of implied meaning, Knutson (1993) argues that there are two processes through which proficient readers figure out the meaning of a text. One is what she terms "bottom-up process" and the other she calls "top-down process" (13). The bottom-up process is when the reader decodes the individual elements of the text to build a total meaning, while in the top-down process the reader starts with forming hypotheses and making predictions. It is obvious that these two strategies are used simultaneously by a successful reader. With regard to the above argument the advantage of using a short story rather than a non-literary text is that some pre-reading activities which can be nicely applied to the short story-such as the discussion of the topic and narrative structure- are very useful in facilitating the readers' top-down process. The short story offers certain advantages for material design for ESL students since this genre includes short textual material to be satisfactorily handled in a one or limited teaching sessions. As John Povey points out, the distinct features of the short story make it desirable for its inclusion in the ESL curriculum because "it is brief, contemporary, interesting and portrays a modern cultural environment that is either relatively familiar to the student or else significantly attached to the target culture of the language s/his studying"

## PROCEDURES AND STRATEGIES

A systematic teaching strategy for the short story can include the following stages:

- I. Pre-reading activities: to provide students with vocabulary exercises and cultural background.
- II. In-class oral reading: to improve oral and spoken abilities.
- III. Textual analysis and group work: to improve reading comprehension and communicative skills.
- IV. Post-reading assignments: to establish the acquired knowledge and improve written skills.

Keeping in mind that the comprehension of the text is the central focus of the reading of the short story, as Richard A. Raschio elucidates, the teacher must pay attention to nonlinear process of the skill of reading: "It involves the integration of sound, symbol, word, phrase, context, text, and cultural information as presented by the author and comprehended by the reader.... When cultural information is considered to be important to the comprehension of a text ...by

providing the author's cultural perspective, we [teachers] encourage students to rely on it rather than on their own view of the cultural content, which might have distorted their comprehension" (1140). For each short story, a number of tasks can be designed to cover the basic language skills required for an efficient reading comprehension. These tasks may include vocabulary work, reading comprehension questions, oral presentation of the text, in-class discussion and interpretation, and finally follow-up tasks which can take the form of written responses or keeping a journal.

## CONCLUSION

In the long run, the teacher's role is a facilitator who guides the students as they draw inference and form learning experiences through personal involvement with the text. The exposure of the students to literature as ESL material can ensure that they enjoy, understand and appreciate a life-like material while they are improving their linguistic proficiency. Thus, it is to the overall benefit of the ESL learners if the instructors promote the use of stories as a tool to introduce, accompany, and supplement tried and basal teaching techniques. The power and emotional impact found in a short story can offer the learners deeper meaning about the acquisition of language skills. Finally, short stories invite students to engage in more active and informed discussion of their involvement with the text and their own personal experiences relevant to the world of the text. While the short story has existed in various forms for centuries, it has particularly flourished during the last hundred years, and especially in recent decades. Though many outstanding novels have been written in the 20th century, most of these writers have also published short fiction. And in many cases, their short stories exhibit a greater degree of coherence and integrity than their longer works. The rise of creative writing programs in the 1960s helped fuel the growth of the short story and brought academic attention to it. So, too, the emergence of multiculturalism encouraged authors of diverse backgrounds to write about their cultures. This reference is a guide to the contemporary English-language short story. Included are alphabetically arranged entries for roughly 50 English-language short story writers from around the world, such as Chinua Achebe, John Barth, Jamaica Kincaid, Salman Rushdie, and Amy Tan. More than half the American writers profiled are from historically marginalized groups, such as Jewish-Americans, African-Americans, and Asian-Americans. Most of these authors have been active since 1960, and they reflect a wide range of experiences and perspectives in their works. Each entry is written by an expert contributor and includes biographical material, a brief review of existing criticism, a lengthier analysis of specific works, and a selected bibliography of primary

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