

## Incorporating Short Stories into ELT Classes: 'The Red Hat' by Morley Callaghan

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### Abstract

The aim of this study is to suggest ways of incorporating literature into ELT classes to facilitate language development with a particular focus on skills practice in a communicative manner as well as critical thinking abilities, creativity and self-expression with Morley Callaghan's short story, The Red Hat. The study provides activities devised for this text to show how literature use can also raise awareness on cultural and gender differences, historical and political events and promote personal growth while familiarizing students with features of a literary text and exposing them to an authentic contextualized teaching /learning material. Literature offers many tools to a language student to utilize and develop in many levels and it provides opportunities for fun, meaningful, interactional and collaborative work, therefore, creates a positive learning /teaching environment. Using short stories realizes this aim in an optimal way both for the students and teachers due to their length, linguistic and literary elements when compared to other genres. Dealing with these elements in a balanced way might ensure the appreciation of the literary text while developing linguistically. The capability to finish reading an authentic work in the target language, understand and interpret it might increase the sense of achievement. This can motivate the entire classes or the individual learners to read more literary works in the class and on their own. The Red Hat by Morley Callaghan is quite appropriate to achieve the anticipated benefits of incorporation of a short story in language classes.

### Keywords

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## INTRODUCTION

The use of literature for language teaching purposes has been a hotly debated issue over long years. Although it has been proven that there are advantages of incorporating literature into foreign language teaching, teachers sometimes hesitate to integrate literature into their classes due to their assumptions that novels, poems, plays and short stories contain complex linguistic features, deviant and figurative language. Their second concern for teachers to distance themselves to exploitation of literature is based on their supposition that they are not equipped with the background education for teaching with literature. Moreover, their busy schedule may further constrain their already decreased confidence and their lack of desire to use literature in the classes.

Literature, however, is a great source for genuine language providing students with structural and lexical samples, a variety of registers and styles, familiarity with communicational purposes in the target language and how they work (Bobkina, 2014). Exposing students to literature has also methodological and motivational benefits as it promotes meaningful and interesting activities involving a lot of interaction and engagement and it helps to create a positive learning atmosphere and a process.

In order for the teachers to benefit from literature in language classes, which genre to be utilized should be decided before everything. Short stories are relatively more suitable for teaching purposes when compared to other genres. Pardede (2011) explains this by stating that short stories are shorter than a novel, easier to follow and finish in comparison to novels. Short stories use fewer examples of figurative or deviant language than poetry and they can work better than plays to act out even in big classes. Mainly, these distinctive features of short stories make them more preferable, which shall be discussed further later in this study.

### Using Literature

Literature has paved its way into language classes thanks to its characteristics such as its authenticity, exposing learners to use of target language and examples of linguistic features of the language as well as its stylistic features, sociocultural norms and conventions. McKay (1982) points out what literature can do in a language classroom is beyond structural support because it offers students not only to notice and familiarize themselves with the components of language but also the use as the language in literature shows the particular use embedded in a particular social context.

Indeed, reading a literary text assists students with the improvement of their language skills other than reading. Collie and Slater (1987) argue that the requirement to make rich inferencing and interpretation in order to fully understand a text can help students improve reading strategies for any written text. While using their personal experience and knowledge to respond to the text, they can be easily encouraged to share and interact with their peers and teacher in an oral practice. With the help of a contextualized undistorted text, students familiarize themselves with how a text is written, how it exploits the structures and lexis of a language, how and in what style and norms they are interwoven. This familiarity clearly extends their understanding of how to write in the target language (Collie and Slater, 1987, p. 7).

At the same time, literature is universal, transcends time and place, and relevant to many contexts. When students see the relevance, they feel interested, motivated and stimulated for a response. They may feel challenged to deal with what is intended for native users. However, according to Collie and Slater (1987) this challenge enables them to make more effort to understand a text written in a foreign language, its literary and linguistic features, which results in higher sense of achievement as well as mastery of language, improvement in abilities such as creativity and analytic thinking (p. 7).

Additionally, a literary text is a great means for cultural enrichment; to learn about the lives of the people speaking a specific language, how they think, behave and feel. Lazar (1993) believes students can gain insights about these people as the representatives of their society and period of time as they discover the cultural values and witness the incidents of that period and history (p. 17).

Having taken the benefits of literature use in an ELT context into consideration, this study sets off to exploit a literary text within a procedural schema to present how literature can be used for the desired learning outcomes.

### **Using Short Stories**

The first crucial step in literature teaching in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms is the selection of the genre to be taught. To be able to utilize literature as a possible teaching/learning unit, one needs to consider which genre might serve the purpose best.

Short stories have some advantages over other genres. Thanks to the easy accessibility and practical use, short stories are usually convenient to introduce literature in language classroom and often they can be completely read in one or two class time. They are less frightening for students to tackle and the sense of achievement students feel is higher, especially because of the less challenging language and length (Collie & Slater, 1987, p. 167).

In short stories, there is usually one plot and limited number of characters, which provides teachers with the convenience to work on the literary elements. They can make learning easier and more entertaining (Crumbley & Smith, 2000, as cited in Saka, 2014, p. 279). While analysing the story, students are active both in mind and heart. They start thinking critically and emotions are awakened in them. They learn about human behaviour and psychology (Saka, 2014). With vivid descriptions, students open doors to imaginary worlds and characters waiting to be discovered, to different views, different lives and cultures as well (Bobkina, 2014).

The element of suspense in short stories involves students to be indulged in the text for resolution of the plot. It is more gripping than the texts in a course book designed particularly for teaching (Lazar, 1993, p. 15). Erkaya (2005), on that matter, adds this tension motivates students of all levels to read the story starting from the beginning to the middle then the end and see how it is resolved.

Furthermore, Pardede (2011) suggests short stories can be a valuable tool to practise all four skills at all levels and age groups. In addition to reading and vocabulary improvement, Pardede (2011) points out short stories can be a great prompt for a wide range of writing activities such as summaries, reports, paraphrasing, reviews, essays and dialogues. According to Pardede (2011), oral reading, dramatization, role playing, reenactment and many other activities can be very effective to improve speaking and listening skills.

Short stories, therefore, can be an easier transition to literature exploitation for language teaching purposes and a medium with multiple values that can enable language competency, cultural and personal development. It is a possibility to foster skill use if utilized accordingly.

### **Selecting the Short Story, The Red Hat**

Another issue to be concerned with is the selection of the short stories which are to be employed in the language classes. While selecting, the length, the language and the relevance of the short story to the students are usually the main considerations in order for the text to yield to interpretations, creativity and language development. In this study, the text which was selected to work with is 'The Red Hat' by Morley Callaghan, a Canadian writer writing mostly about life and issues in human relationships. It is an eight-page short story that can be read at one class hour or two, depending on the level of the students or aims of the teacher how to use it and what for.

Another key factor in the selection of this story is its appeal to the students from the perspective of their educational, social and literary background, level, age and gender (Violetta- Irene, 2015). This story is considered to be fit for the prep classes of the universities where the usual student profile is a mixed group of frequently 18-year-old females and males from different social and literary backgrounds. Being able to address these differences is another concern in selecting the material. The minimum level of the students for whom this story is appropriate is pre-intermediate (A2). It is not a simplified version, hence the level of authenticity of the literary text is intact. It is an important aim to expose students to authentic texts and an important reason to use literary texts in language teaching/learning. It is also assumed that when the students see that they are able to read and understand a genuine text, the level of sense of achievement increases.

As for the cultural enrichment, it can be stated the text can allow the students to be very much aware of the social, political and historical background of the period (Lazar, 1993, p. 17) by witnessing the financial difficulties a middle-class family go through, human relationships and the emotional relationship between a woman and man in particular. The sufferings while trying to earn a living, unemployment, depression and how all these affect people at a personal level can be experienced by anyone at any stage in their lives. The class distinction, its portrayal in the dressings and life style can also be another element, students not only learn about but also relate to independently from time and place. The author's concentration in such a theme makes his work universal and characters that are ordinary that anybody can relate to, which is to increase the likelihood that students could see a relevance, identify themselves or any other being in their lives with the characters, make interpretations and inferences much more easily. The relationship between the woman and the man in this story is also believed to interest students to read about as well as their individual psychological states in the post-modern world trying to live a happy life.

What's more, the protagonist of the story is a woman. Therefore, seeing things through her eyes may raise an awareness on gendered speech, social roles, social-gender, gender equality and female issues (Yavuz, 2015). The depiction of the role and identity of the woman in the society, the attitudes of a woman towards her husband and marriage in that matter, her fears, hopes and yearnings could help students understand and develop a sensitivity towards gender differences. Her desire to live a better life, search for happiness, as if purchasing 'the red hat' would change everything in her life and marriage, is something that can be experienced even today. The important decision that she has to make at the end of the story is another thing to sympathize with. Everybody faces a dilemma at some point in their lives and everybody finds themselves in a position to make an important decision.

The teacher's personal interests and preferences as a person play a significant role in selection. Bibby and McIlroy (2013) argue that when the teacher selects a text that s/he likes or would like to read, it is more likely that neither s/he feels bored nor the students. The enthusiasm might be shared with the students and students might perceive the whole process as a positive one.

The mentioned selection criteria and how this particular short story meets them is mainly the reason why this study chooses to work on it. It is this rationale behind opting for the given text to be used as a teaching aid.

## **METHOD**

### **The Models for Integrating Literature in Foreign Language Teaching**

The most widely acknowledged three models for teaching literature proposed by Lazar (1993) —the language model, the cultural model, and the personal growth model—are different in their focus. In the language model, the focus is on grammatical and structural analysis, in the cultural model, it is on cultural elements, and in the personal growth model, personal growth is aimed to be promoted. Each has its own strengths and weaknesses, therefore, the integrated approach can be a way to take advantage of the strong points of each model. It can help students to acquire language effectively while increasing cultural awareness and improving interpretative skills. It can also strengthen students' abilities to make connections, generalizations, and transfer these abilities and knowledge to real world situations (Yimwilai, 2015).

Moreover, most scholars state that none of the approaches to literature teaching in the ELT classroom is comprehensive and they can be implemented independently. A balance and combination of the approaches is believed to guarantee learners' motivation and development (Bobkina, 2014). In this sense, integration may give teachers the chance to combine a variety of methods, techniques, and technical devices to enhance academic achievement and critical thinking skills (Adeyemi, 2010, as cited in Yimwilai, 2015, p. 14).

For the abovementioned propositions, this study aims to adopt an integrated approach while suggesting ways on how to use the short story 'The Red Hat' as a possible unit in ELT classes and the proposed activities. It provides a guide to facilitate linguistic development, cultural awareness and personal growth within a four-skills framework in a communicative manner.

## Suggested Activities

There are many ways to study a literary text and many activities to use. The activities in this study are designed to enable language use with a communicative purpose through interaction. The aim is to help learners with their four skills of listening, reading, writing and speaking in a meaningful way. Another goal is to ensure that students would see a relevance while focusing on the language in a contextualized way, seize the opportunity for personal growth, cultural awareness, develop a liking towards literature and see how they can actually develop themselves from many aspects. Therefore, the activities require students to interact with the text, make interpretations to reveal its message and connections with their own lives.

Lazar (1993) proposes a divided reading to help students tackle with the texts much more easily. The design in this study follows Lazar's three-part activity model of pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading (1993, pp. 83-84). Furthermore, it also adopts Violetta-Irene's (2015) suggestion to handle texts in sections for both the teacher to design activities in an organized way and for the students to be able to handle the text with ease. The text is divided into two sections accordingly.

Section 1 from the beginning to the end of page 3

Section 2 from page 4 to the end

The reason why the text is divided in this manner is based on the consideration that the climax, when the red hat is bought by the protagonist, is believed to create more opportunities for prediction and increase the level of excitement to see what happens at the end of the story.

### Section 1: Pre-Reading Activities

Pre-reading activities help students with the cultural background of the story and they generate interest (Lazar, 1993, p. 83). They can also familiarize students with the characters and even pre-teach them the vocabulary (Violetta-Irene, 2015). However, in this study it has been decided to tackle with vocabulary not at this stage in order not to temper much with the student-text interaction and allow students to make guesses and draw their own conclusions.

#### *Activity 1*

##### *Warm-up*

Lima (2010) proposes using some imaginative material such as visuals to be exploited as warm-up or follow-up activities. In this activity, students are asked to do a teacher-creation, 5 pieces red hat picture puzzle (either using technology or paper) in pairs, then say what it is. Having elicited the title, students are then told they are going to read a story called 'The Red Hat' by Morley Callaghan. They answer the questions:

What do you think it is about?

Have you ever heard of this story or its writer?

#### *Activity 2*

##### *Character Speculation*

Students choose one of the main character's name card (Frances, Mrs. Foley, Eric), discuss who it might be in the story in groups of three or four. This can be followed by more discussion on what they think about the relationship between them. Then, they discuss the questions below in pairs/groups or whole class.

1. Do you know anything about Great Depression in the 1930s? What were the effects of it?
2. In your opinion how did the life for people after the Second World War change?
3. Who do you think wore hats in that time?
4. What do you think the role of a woman in those days was?

### Activity 3

Collie and Slater (1987) suggest listening to a section or part of the text might enrich the experience. It might interest students, help them activate their schemata, bring about some details and personal response while listening and jotting down (p. 57). In this activity, students listen to the teacher read the first paragraph:

It was the kind of hat Frances had wanted for months, plain and little and red with the narrow brim tacked back, which would look so smart and simple and expensive. There was really very little to it, it was so plain, but it was the kind of felt hat that would have made her feel confident of a sleek appearance. She stood on the pavement, her face pressed up close against the shop window, a slender, tall and good-looking girl wearing a reddish woollen dress clinging tightly to her body. On the way home from work, the last three evenings, she had stopped to look at the hat. And when she had got home she had told Mrs. Foley, who lived in the next apartment, how much the little hat appealed to her. In the window were many smart hats, all very expensive. There was only one red felt hat, on a mannequin head with a silver face and very red lips (Callaghan, 2003, p. 1).

While listening, they take notes of some important words or facts. Then, in pairs or groups students share their lists, discuss what is happening in the first paragraph, the setting, the characters and so on. Students then speculate about what is going to happen next.

### While-Reading Activities

This kind of activities help with the plot and the characters. They also assist to handle the difficult lexical items or language (Lazar, 1993, p. 83).

#### Activity 1

##### Paragraph Summary

Students read section 1 and in pairs summarize each paragraph with one sentence *e.g. Paragraph 1: Frances is in the street going back home from work.* With each sentence of their paragraph summary, students have a relatively concise summary of the first section, which then they check with other pairs to see if they have missed anything, want to make changes or addition (Violetta-Irene, 2015).

#### Activity 2

Students in pairs or groups list the characters they have met in Section 1 and discuss what they know about them so far, how they would describe them or characterize them so on (Violetta-Irene, 2015).

#### Activity 3

Students answer the questions below in pairs, then check /discuss as a group or whole class.

- 1) Why wasn't Frances wearing a coat?
- 2) What does 'she had no intention of buying it' mean? Why didn't she have the intention to buy the hat?
- 3) What did the saleslady think when Frances wanted to try on the red hat? Why?
- 4) How did Frances feel when she tried the red hat on?

#### Activity 4

##### Vocabulary Game

Students match the words below with their definitions. This could be a mingle activity where two teams with word cards and definition cards try to find a match. Alternatively, it could be a pen and paper match either individually or in pairs.

- |             |  |
|-------------|--|
| 1. felt     | a) unfriendly, seeming to consider yourself better than others |
| 2. hesitate | b) to be able to buy something because you have enough money   |
| 3. afford   | c) a type of thick, soft cloth made of pressed wool and hair   |

4. elegant                      d) to pause before you do or say something  
 5. haughty                      e) graceful and attractive in appearance and behaviour

### Post-Reading Activities

Post-reading activities function as a means for interpretations, expressions of personal response to the text, thoughts, emotions, experience and so on. They also provide learners with the chance to practice the language skills (Lazar, 1993, p. 84). In order for students to unveil the 'multiple levels of meaning' (Lazar, 1993, p. 17) and react to the text personally, activities that demand such behaviour are required, which can result in appreciation of the richness in meaning and improvement of skills and language.

#### Activity 1

1. 'It was the kind of hat Frances had wanted for months, plain and little and red with the brim tacked back, which would look so smart and simple and expensive.'

What do these lines tell about Frances as a character and the hat as a symbol?

2. 'She smiled happily, noticing in the mirror that her face was the shape of the mannequin face, a little long and narrow, the nose fine and firm, and she took out her lipstick and marked her lips.'

What can you make out of these lines about the sense of beauty in the society?

#### Activity 2

Students write five pieces of information about the first section of the story two of which are true. Then, students try to find the false information and correct them in pairs or groups (Violetta-Irene, 2015).

#### Activity 3

Students discuss the two questions below in pairs or groups.

1) Why do you think Frances was trying to please her husband? Do you think it was considered to be one of the roles of a married woman back then? Is it the same or different today?

2) Frances had very little money left from her salary and needed a coat more than a hat, and yet again she bought it. Do you also sometimes buy things you don't really need just to look or feel better?

### Section 2 Pre-Reading Activities

#### Activity 1

##### Prediction

Students discuss the questions in pairs or groups.

1. What will Eric do when he sees the red hat?
2. What will Frances' decision be about the hat and her life?

### While-Reading activities

#### Activity 1

Students read section 2 and discuss the questions in pairs or groups.

1. Why did Frances lie to Mrs. Foley about what happened?
2. How much money did Mrs. Foley give for the hat? Why?
3. What did Eric mean when he said 'I'll clear out of here for good.'? Why did he say that?
4. Was Frances satisfied with anything happened or in her life when she said 'I am absolutely satisfied.'? Why did she say it? What does this tell about her as a character?

**Activity 2**

Students find the words in the text.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ (adj): feeling ashamed or shy (p 4, para. 1)
2. \_\_\_\_\_ (n) : something on sale at a lower price than its true value (p 5, para. 2)
3. \_\_\_\_\_ (v): to say firmly or demand forcefully especially when others disagree with or oppose what you say (p 5, para. 3)
4. \_\_\_\_\_ (adj): something that is easy to recognize because it is different from other things (p 8)

**Activity 3**

Students study the examples below and discover the meaning and grammatical structure in each, notice the differences and then finish the sentences.

1. 'I suppose I could change it if my husband didn't like it.'
2. 'Listen, dear, if I want it back next week, you will sell it back to me for five?'
3. If my husband likes it, I \_\_\_\_\_.
4. If I had more money, \_\_\_\_\_.
5. If \_\_\_\_\_.

**Post-Reading Activities****Activity 1**

Students make a list of reasons of Frances' decision at the end of the story in pairs and then in groups they compare their answers. (Lazar, 1993, p. 79).

Students then discuss:

1. Would you have made the same decision if you had been in her position?

**Activity 2****Role Play: Police Inquiry**

Students imagine Mrs. Foley called the police when she heard the couple quarrel. In groups of four, each student plays a character and the police officer questions the characters about the incident. Then, groups discuss the findings.

**Activity 3****Homework**

Collie and Slater (1987) state rereading ensures full appreciation of the richness of short stories. Because they are short, one time reading does not suffice for this (p. 168). Students reread and write an alternative end to the story thinking e.g. *What would have happened if Frances had decided to keep the hat?*

**CONCLUSION**

Introducing literature to students has many benefits in language teaching /learning contexts. It can be beneficial not only for literary development but also language and skills. The whole process inevitably brings about personal growth and cultural enrichment. Short stories in particular add more to the number of benefits a language student can draw on. They do this in a less fearful way due to their aforementioned distinctive features. Students can see it is an enjoyable and active process that can lead to enhancement and enrichment regarding their target language knowledge and skills. It gives huge sense of achievement and even enhances their confidence to read more literary texts in class or on their own. It may be achieved in a collaborative and interactional way, not necessarily in a different manner than any other classroom task or reading activity. It raises the awareness on lives of other cultures,



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people, time and places. It also gives students a chance to express their own feelings, thoughts and experiences. While doing so, they have the opportunity to engage in critical thinking, activate their creativity and practice problem solving abilities. The short story selected is convenient for the stated purposes to be achieved due to its length, language, limited number of characters that are ordinary and a plot that is universal. The fact that it reflects its time and setting, illustrates human relationships, represents the beliefs, thoughts and feelings of the people living in that historical background and focuses on female issues makes the text very much appropriate to study in an ELT class within a design that is communicative and skills based.

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