**TEACHING WRITING SHORT STORIES**

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**Summary**

The article runs about methodology approach to teaching writing short stories both as an interactive activity during English classes from primary to high school and a relatively young literary genre which can be taught during the course of “Creative and academic writing” at higher educational establishments. The paper focuses on the stages of writing (pre-writing, drafting, editing, and publishing). The author shows how to develop different elements and characters while compiling a short story. This kind of literary text is also regarded as a tool to develop team work and leadership skills within small groups while writing descriptive, narrative or discursive pieces of the story during the classes. Particular attention is paid to the use and introduction of visual aids as means of making a short story visually attractive and appealing to the reader. The latter becomes of special importance during all stages of writing Here we deal with pictures, videos and font taking into consideration the colour scheme. In this regard, the question of plagiarism becomes an object of consideration too.

**Keywords:** a short story, stages of writing, class, visual aids, a character.

Derived from tales short stories have accompanied us since the beginning of the XIX century due to a number of successful literary pieces belonging to Edgar Allan Poe, Anton Chehov, Franz Kafka and many other brilliant fiction writers. They transformed fairy tales into realistic prose, appealing and remarkable. Short stories could be read in a single sitting and it was key to the form. It allowed the reader to have an uninterrupted experience of the fictional world [1].

Writing short stories as an academic activity proved to be an exciting experience both for students and their teacher. The process of telling tales is quite natural. It turns us back to our childhood when fiction was an everyday reality with a child’s brain producing endless successions of images, heroes, and events. Still when in a classroom, we face definite principles of writing such literary pieces. Like many other literary works, short stories are marked with different peculiarities which could be regarded as some rules for a game. We should develop the major elements of fiction — [character](https://www.thebalance.com/the-definition-of-character-in-fiction-writing-1277093), [plot](https://www.thebalance.com/plot-fiction-writing-glossary-definition-1277127), theme, [point of view](https://www.thebalance.com/point-of-view-1277038), etc. The space for developing an author’s ideas is also limited. Usually short stories are about ten to twenty-five pages. (The cut-off for most journals is 10,000 words). But as an academic activity it may range from 1 to 4 pages taking into consideration the students’ age, language and literary skills, and creativity. The amount of work you can develop with the students also depends on time limitations during the class. The best option to work out all the stages of writing is a special course of “Creative and academic writing” or a literary club, etc. But being pressed for time it is always up to the teacher which activities he / she can practice with the students. Still in this paper we are focusing on the full cycle of producing the above mentioned piece of writing.

To meet this challenge, short-story writers generally follow, consciously or unconsciously, a pretty standard list of rules. But the teacher should remember Alan Maley’s recommendation: “Try to establish a relaxed, non-judgmental atmosphere, where your students feel confident enough to let go and not to worry that their every move is being scrutinized for errors. [2]”

***THE PRE-WRITING STAGE*** takes the biggest part of all activities. At this very point it is crucially important to think over the plot and the characters, their appearance, behavior, typical reactions in typical situations, and peculiarities of speech and thinking. That is the high time to get the students to cooperate with each other as a small team which is to achieve common goals. A teacher may easily turn these necessities into a number of interesting activities. The first one can be a brainstorming [3, p. 308].

**Activity 1** *Think about two characters of your story and write down a list of adjective to depict them.*

My students’ list looks like that:

Mary Alan

Cheerful gloomy

Extravert introvert

Easy-going reserved

Slim lanky

If your students’ list seems quite long they may be asked to cross out repeated notions or those which are of less importance. The role of a teacher is to help understand that these personal qualities are a key to the heroes’ relationships and behavior. Thus, this list may vary and change during the whole process of writing.

The next activity is for a team of 3-5 students each of them having his / her own task but working on it in cooperation with the whole team in succession.

**Activity 2** *Write a descriptive paragraph about your characters (student 1 with others);*

*write a narrative piece about your character (student 2 with others);*

*write a discursive piece about your character (student 3 with others);*

*write a dialogue revealing a typical situation your characters are in (student 4 with others)*

*describe a typical situation from the life of your character (student 5).*

This activity helps students realize the essence of their characters’ lives and to come up closer to the plot of the short story.

To fit the heroes into the plot is also an interesting piece of work, which can be organized in several activities. But the teacher should firstly present the scheme of a literary piece or develop it with the students taking into account their previous reading experience or knowledge and skills from a number of literature classes. It is also important to remind that the time frame is limited meaning that they cannot tell the whole life story but only about one peculiar period of time. That is one more rule for a short story writing.

The short story structure is rather conventional:

EXPOSITION 🡪 RISING ACTION🡪 CLIMAX🡪 DENOUEMENT

**Activity 1** *The students**can be suggested to write several sentences about:*

1. *how the story begins; b) what happens next; c) what is the problem; d) how it is solved; e) how the story ends.* One option is to write one by one, sentence by sentence on one and the same paper passing it to each other. Thus, all the students in the team of 5 are involved in developing the story’s plot.

The next stage of this activity presupposes discussion of the best variants mentioned. The role of a teacher is quite important here as he / she should not only “lead” the students to the best ideas but also remind them about the reader and his needs to “consume” a bestseller where not everything is on the surface and so clear and simple. The teacher is facilitating the whole process but not imposes the ideas.

**Activity 2** *Imaging that your story is a precious necklace with small and bigger purles coming up one after another. These purles are the events in your story. How would you arrange them?*

This activity may help the students come back again to the classical structure of a short story being quite selective and choosing only best “purles” for their masterpieces.

Now when we have all necessary elements of a short story it is high time to put them all together.

At the stage of***DRAFTING*** we start organizing all the above mentioned ideas into real sentences and paragraphs but still with little attention to grammar or proper vocabulary. We focus more on grasping the ideas.

**Activity 1** a)*Write the introductory paragraph to your story;*

1. *write the body of your story;*
2. *write about the conflict;*
3. write *the concluding paragraph.*

A good option is to get students work in pairs where one is writing and another is facilitating.

When the students finish they may be asked to exchange their works with the representatives of other pairs to develop the ideas further.

**Activity 2** is for 2 students who are given different roles – writer and editor.

**Student A.**  *Imagine that you have become a witness of the story. You decide to share your ideas with your friend by email. Send him / her a letter with your story attached. You are eager to hear your friend’s feedback. Think about 5-6 questions you would like your friend to answer about your story.*

***Student B.*** *As**soon as you receive your friend’s story write him / her back a letter with the feedback. Try to be friendly but critical*.

This activity enables the students to make their stories better in cooperation with others. It also shows that other people may think differently and unexpectedly.

At thestage of **EDITING** the skeleton of a short story gets its body**.** It is when short sentences become complex, with more developed ideas. We usuallydeals with “cleaning” the paper from grammar and lexical errors, providing proper cohesion in the paragraphs and between the paragraphs. The role of a teacher is one of the leading. Each piece of writing is unique and it needs specific help, which can tremendously improve the work making it a real product for the reader.

Some activities could be provided to help students develop the character or situation, etc.

**Activity 1** *Put down some synonyms to describe a reserved man (or any other). Write some more sentences to describe him.*

**Activity 2** *Look at the list of linking words. Which of them could be used to provide better transition between your ideas in the paragraph A?*

**Activity *3*** *Imagine that your are the editor working for The New York Times. You receive a short story to be published in the upcoming issue. The author of the story is quite young but promising. Read his / her paper and put down some remarks. Then have a talk with the author in your office. Give him / her a chance to improve.*

The teacher should remember that it is quite hard to improve all the aspects of writing in one class, making every student a writer. The process may turn to be quite stressful and oppressive. So, the best option is to deal with a specific aspect of writing every time (language, literary structure or ideas). If you practice different skills from class to class, sooner or later you will be surprised will good results.

Checking and improving the paper may be also accompanied with quite interesting and interactive tasks dealing with visual attractiveness of the paper. At this point we can distract students’ attention from errors focusing on the esthetic facet. You can suggest answering the following questions to develop visual images to go with the story:

* *How will you illustrate your article?*
* *What kind of photographs / pictures will convey to your readers whatever you want them to know about your character / events / conflict, etc.?*
* *How will you make the text visually attractive (font, colour scheme, etc.)?*
* *Will you show the people involved in the story / setting / emotions, etc.?*
* *What will your illustrations enable your reader to see? What will the picture add to the understanding of the short story?*
* *How will you arrange the visual aids?*
* *Are you going to produce the images yourself, ask someone for help or borrow? (Discuss the rules of borrowing somebody’s ideas to avoid plagiarism).*

**PUBLISHING** is one of the most thrilling parts of the creative process, which is sometimes neglected and reduced to mere passing the paper to a teacher. We should take into account that publishing is the most motivating instrument the teacher may have. That is why it must be properly arranged. Here are some ideas:

* making a blog to share short stories;
* sticking them on the wall in the classroom / school for everyone to read;
* building a literary tower to demonstrate short stories;
* reading short stories in a class or during some events;
* organizing a competition;
* voting for the bestseller in social media, etc.

We can come up with a number of ideas but the main point is to make the works public and thus worthy but not dumped deeply on the teacher’s shelf. In such a way we stimulate our students’ enthusiasm, cognition, and desire to create new and even better pieces of writing.

In conclusion, we may state that writing a short story is a creative and many-facet process which requires thorough preparation. Run carefully through all the stages of pre-writing, drafting, editing, and publishing, short stories may bring fruitful results in terms of better language acquisition, in general, and writing, in particular. The latter turns to be a complex skill, which demands good critical thinking, awareness of literary peculiarities of a genre, teamwork and readiness to share your ideas with others.

**References**

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