A thematic unit on folk literature designed for middle school English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) instruction, for students with beginner to intermediate level skills, is presented. The intention in introducing literature at these levels is to provide positive experiences with literature in the target language, and to introduce the target culture. The relationship of reader to text is discussed with reference to relevant literature, and the roles of background knowledge (linguistic information, knowledge of the world, and knowledge of discourse structure) and schema theory in this relationship are examined. Advantages in the selection of folk literature for second language study are considered, and specific classroom techniques and activities are discussed. Considerations in selecting the sequence of stories presented are explored, and a sequence of five stories is presented, with notes on the authors and on class activities for the pre-reading, efferent (factual), aesthetic, and follow-up stages of reading. Contains 28 references. (MSE)
Thematic Units for EFL teachers:
Folk Literature

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Abstract

This thematic unit was designed for EFL middle school teachers to teach literature in the classroom. The first section discusses the rationale as follows: (1) the use of literature in the EFL classroom; (2) defining the reader; (3) selection of literature; (4) to the EFL teachers; and (5) story sequences selected. The second section introduces the three-stage lesson plan: (1) pre-reading stage; (2) during reading stage; and (3) follow-up reading stage. Finally, five thematic units were introduced.
Thematic Units: Folk Literature

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Introduction

Throughout history, the comforting story runs, people have loved to sit around the flickering fire, chilling one another's blood with tales of monsters and the vengeful dead. The theme such as horror, scary, or ghost, come to us so tightly woven into the fabric of everyday culture that they appear natural and inevitable. We might imagine vampire, dracula, zombies, graveyard, church, castle, and so on. Even though cross-culturally every community of a culture has enjoyed these horror stories, we can notice cultural differences in the setting, main characters, or plot.

The above characters or settings are related to the western culture of horror stories. But during early days, the stories which your grandparents told you in the non-Western society might be different from those of the western society. Using literature with horror or scary stories at the beginning of the foreign language lesson help students enjoy the lesson as well as teach them aspects of a target culture (Muyskens, 1983).

Target population

This thematic unit was designed for EFL middle students who are studying English a school subject. Students' language proficiency levels range from the novice-level to the low intermediate level (ACTFL Scale: Omaggio-Hadley, 1993). Students' age levels range from 12 to 14 years old. Many EFL/ESL researchers seemed to agree that literature should be used with the advanced level students (Herr, 1982). This assumption might be based on two prejudices. The first one was that the goal of foreign language classes has been to learn the language rather than use the language to learn (Swaffar, 1991). The second was the emphasis of foreign literature courses on the literacy criticism (Muyskens, 1983). But the early use of literary texts functions as a medium to use the authentic language and to understand a target culture (Hunfeld, 1990).

The most important thing when introducing literature to the novice or intermediate level students is to make students have positive experiences in literature and further study a target language in future days (Steiner, 1972). The topic or theme as well as teaching techniques should
be interesting and initially involve literature. This thematic unit is designed to give the students an initial good experience in the target language, English. Furthermore it will provide them opportunities to get in touch with the target culture through literature in indirect ways and to experience the literary texts.

**Definition of Literature and Culture**

The definition of “literature” has been discussed with the concept of culture in the EFL/ESL literature. In general the literature has been defined as “a product of a given culture or inclusive model of a target culture” (Scott, 1965, p. 293). The debate about the definition of literature might start with the definition, “a work of imagination, infused with a dominant aesthetic intent”, suggested by the 1967 Northeast Conference Reports. This definition was related to that of culture, “high culture” (Brooks, 1964). This made foreign teachers or researchers define “literature” as “masterpieces or great classics”, which include high cultural aspects of a target community (Lalande, 1988). This limited definition has made it hard for both foreign language teachers and students to have access to literature.

Several researchers proposed that the definition of literature should be broadened (Brooks, 1972; Lalande, 1988). They suggested that literature should include “low culture” as well as “high culture”. In this thematic unit, literature is defined as “common perceptions or feelings of a target language community” in combination with culture. Even though we need some balance between high culture and low culture designing a thematic unit, this thematic unit focuses on the low culture of common people rather than high culture, considering young novice level EFL middle school students.

**Rationale**

The Use of Literature in the EFL classrooms

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1Brooks (1964) distinguished between high culture and low culture as follows: “the artistic and scientific contributions of a language community” and “everyday behavior patterns of a language community.” (Lalande, 1988, p. 573)
There is a strong rationale for using literature in the EFL/ESL classrooms (Mckay, 1982; Gajdusek, 1988; Povey, 1967). Literature will increase linguistic skills and provide a link between a language and a culture (Povey, 1967). Mckay (1982) suggested that literature increases students' motivation to interact with a literal text as well as linguistic knowledge (p. 531). Spack (1985) argued that literature functions as subjects to composition as well as expand students' vocabulary knowledge by using a pre-reading activity. Yanes (1992) also proposed that the early introduction of literary texts functions as authentic materials for teaching linguistic structure and cultural thought. In addition the stylistic complexity or complex vocabulary of literature provided students with comprehensible input. The most important purpose of using literature is to involve students in direct interaction with the text (Mckay, 1982; Gajdusek, 1988, p. 229).

Defining the reader

Kramsch (1993) defined the readers as to the extent of their involvement with the nature of the meanings. Kramsch described three paradigms: grammatical purpose, efferent purpose, and aesthetic purpose (p. 137). The first purpose is important for EFL/ESL students, because they can not access factual reading or involve to experience a literary text without linguistic knowledge. This can be done with a pre-reading activity like vocabulary instruction or brief grammar instruction before reading efferently or aesthetically. The debate about the definition of “reader” has focused on efferent and aesthetic reading. Rosenblatt (1994) made a distinction between efferent and aesthetic reading as follows:

“In an efferent reading of a text, the attention is focused on abstracting out, analyzing, and structuring what is to be retained after the reading, e.g. information, logical argument, or instructions for action. In an aesthetic reading, attention is focused on what is being lived through, the ideas and feelings being evoked and organized during the transaction. This experience constitutes the literary work that is the object of response and interpretation.” (pp. 22-47)

Current reader-response theorists put more value on aesthetic reading (Lalande, 1988).

2Comprehensible input can be defined as materials which correspond to the students' current level of proficiency, but which contains linguistic structures that also exceed that level. (Omaggio-Hadley, 1986, p. 85)
They argued the importance of the personal experience of the reader in understanding the experience of literature (Rosenblatt, 1938). This argument promoted the movement towards student-centered methods from traditional teacher-centered methods of teaching literature. If we define reading as "transaction between the reader and the text", we also define the reader as "an active interpreter based on their previous experience or background knowledge", rather than a passive receiver of incoming information. Based on this theoretic assumption, we need to discuss schema theory so that students can bring their previous knowledge or experience to the text.

The Role of Background Knowledge and Schema theory

Omaggio-Hadley (1993) described three types of background knowledge: linguistic information; the knowledge of the world; and knowledge of discourse structure (p. 131). Schema theory suggested that "comprehending a text is an interactive process between reader's background knowledge and the text" (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983, p. 556). They suggested that providing background knowledge and previewing content for the reader was the most important teaching strategy. The first type of background information suggested by Omaggio-Hadley (1993) can be provided by pre-reading or previewing vocabulary activities.

The second background information includes cultural aspects as well as a general world knowledge. One technique suggested by Ausubel (1968) was to provide "advance organizer" to activate relevant background knowledge (Omaggio-Hadley, 1993, p. 131). The use of a movie or a picture might be useful. In addition another way to activate students' cultural background or world knowledge was to use personalized questions (Lalande, 1988, p. 577). A background knowledge of discourse structure can be described as "the understanding of how various kinds of discourse are organized" (Omaggio-Hadley, 1993, p. 131). Through the experience of hearing and reading many stories, people develop "a set of expectations" which serves as a guide as we organize story information (Shadow, 1982, p. 519). Mandler & Johnson (1977) originally defined a set of expectations, so called "story schema", as "an idealized internal representation of the parts of a typical story and relationships among those parts" (p. 111).
As Povey (1967) pointed out, current ESL/EFL researchers have exaggerated the significance of “readability”, that is linguistic difficulty. If we assume that every community within a culture has an oral tradition like “folk literature”, they also internalize “story schema”. We are apt to focus on the linguistic difficulty at the expense of the importance of literature, when working with low-level ESL/EFL students. Through interaction between the reader and the texts students should be directly involved with the text (McKay, 1982; Widdowson, 1978), we need to focus on entertainment or experience as well as readability, selecting literature or using literature with ESL/EFL students. Given a pre-reading activity such as semantic mapping, students can predict the story or guess difficult vocabulary. This pre-reading activity will provide students with story schema before reading a literary text.

Selection of Literature (folk literature)

The rationale for choosing specific genre, “folk literature” has been supported by many foreign language experts (Seelye, 1993). Folk literature has been used to teach English in the United States through the popular Foxfire series (Wigginton, 1972). The use of folk literature in EFL classrooms provides students with advantages in both linguistic and cultural viewpoints.

Pedersen (1993) suggested several advantages from the linguistic points of view as follows: (1) very short; (2) familiar; (3) less complex grammatically and syntactically; (4) consistent in style and form; (5) a rich variety of words; (6) fun, interesting, and appeal to imagination of all readers. The merits can be useful to Korean EFL novice-level or intermediate-level students from the linguistic view. The fourth advantage is related to students’ “predictability” or “story schema”. The final advantage is the most important feature in involving EFL young students initially in the foreign literature.

Seelye (1993) suggested that folk literature conveyed the cultural themes that underlies a country’s thought and feelings. Because folklore is the culture of “the common people”, this can be useful in teaching culture (Magliocco, 1992). In addition folk literature covers a wide range of emotions, life experiences, values, humorous and serious situations and generally all aspects of life
which relates to culture (Pedersen, 1993). For these advantages, folk literature was chosen in the thematic unit. The selection of folk literature represents my operational definition of literature as well (p. 3).

To the teacher

Traditionally foreign language instruction in the middle or high schools has been characterized as a teacher-centered classroom, in particular, in the East Asian countries. Considering that reading literature is an interaction between the reader and text, it is important to bring students’ background knowledge to a text in experiencing literature. This implies that the classrooms should be students-centered. Even though many foreign language teachers seem to be aware of this important fact, they feel pressured to using certain teaching techniques because of a large class size. But many teaching techniques were already explored and some useful methods were mentioned above. The most useful method is a group activity in a large class. In addition individual personal experience can be assigned to homework pre-writing or post-writing after reading.

When you, as foreign language teachers, apply these teaching methods or your creative techniques to your classroom, the most important thing is to make students’ initial reading experience pleasurable (Muyskens, 1983, p. 415). Initial positive experience makes young EFL students continue to read texts from the target culture (Steiner, 1972).

Finally, foreign language teachers should remember that they are teaching young EFL learners. The use of realia such as picture stories, a movies, or real objects, should be encouraged. In addition young children should be allowed to experience a text with physical activities such as role-play or drama rather than just oral discussion.

The following teaching activities might be recommended in the EFL classrooms:

Pre-reading activities:

-encourage students to brainstorm their previous experiences with movies or pictures about the theme or personalized questions (Lalande, 1989).
-draw students’ content schemata or genre schemata with semantic mapping, story grammar
(Sadow, 1982), and macro-cloze activity (Whaley, 1981, p. 769).
- pre-introduction of new vocabulary which are unfamiliar culturally or linguistically, with cloze activity
- use realia
- experience: pre-writing (Spack, 1985), story-telling (Hendrickson, 1992),

During reading:
- group activity
- arranging the sequence of the story with scrambled scripts (Hendrickson, 1992)
- create drama with scripts like role-play or improvisation
- shared reading or reading to other groups
- cultural discussion by comparing their pre-reading personal experience with the story

Follow-up reading:
- journal writing about their feelings or cultural differences
- writing a letter to the author about the story
- making story for him/herself based on story grammar or their creative idea (Sadow, 1982)
- story-telling in class.

Story Sequences selected
The following background information will be useful for EFL teachers who use this thematic unit:
(1) Basically, the information about the author might not be important because folk literature is an oral tradition descended from generation to generation. We had better consider the author as "editor" or "collector". So the information about the author might not be sufficient in this thematic unit.
(2) Each story is cyclically related to a previous one.

The first two stories follow the same topic and story components. The main characters and settings are almost similar. The reason to choose two stories helps students predict each story content with limited linguistic knowledge. Once your students understand the first story, they can predict the second story. As teachers you try to connect two stories so that students can bring previous knowledge to the next lesson. In addition you help students brainstorm their story components embedded in their own culture and a target culture: settings, characters, plot, and so on. Students identify cultural similarities and differences between two communities.
The third story shows us American traditional beliefs about omens and portents of “death”. Even though this theme is different from previous ones, you can connect this story with previous ones. I choose the story, “Like Cats’ Eyes” among several stories dealing with “death”, because the title name is related to one expression, “a fraidy cat” in the previous story. This story will be introduced with several very short stories showing American belief about “omen” or “portents” of death. As teachers you need to compare different belief systems to increase cultural awareness.

The final two folktales are different from previous ones in that these are urban legends. The previous ones deal with traditional stories, while these stories show more modern or urban beliefs in the oral tradition. Urban legends can be divided into several topics and further their variations. But most topics deal with sexual issues or they are descriptive stories, not in story form. And hence the famous urban legend, “The Vanishing Hitchhiker”, was selected. Around this story, many variations were developed among people. In this theme unit, two stories dealing with the same topic were chosen. They also have the same theme and story components. You can relate one story to the other by way of semantic mapping.

(3) In this thematic unit cultural objects can be described as follows:

(a) settings, the characteristics of the characters, and plot, - the first two stories.

(b) different beliefs in the “omen” of the “death” and life styles - the third

© specific events: party, driving a car, setting, and so on

Theme Unit 1


Author: Alvin Schwartz is the author of many books for young people about folk humor, folk like, and other aspects of folklore. He also has written on such varied subjects as crafts, museums, and urban life. Mr. Schwartz lives in Princeton, New Jersey. He and his wife have four children and two black cats.
Stephen Gammell has illustrated many books for young readers, including *Demo and the Dolphin* by Nathaniel Benchley and *Terrible Things* by Eve Bunting. Mr. Gammell has written and illustrated his own book, *Once Upon McDonald's Farm*. He and his wife live in Minneapolis, where they are still looking for their black cat, Paul, who ran away three years ago.

"The Girl Who Stood on a Grave"

1. Pre-reading stage:

(a) Introduction of scary or horror movie:

This introduction is designed to appeal to students' early experience about "scary" or "horror" and to make them familiar with the topic of the class.

(b) Brainstorming:

The following questions draw students' previous background knowledge or experiences about scary stories or movies:

- Is there something that scared you long ago or more recently?
- Or Has anybody had a chance to read or watch some scary stories or movies current days?
- What is the most terrible or scary ones from the movie?
- Where do scary stories happen? (setting)
- When do these scary stories happen? (setting)
- Who usually appears in these stories? (Characters)
- What usually happens in these stories? (Events or themes)

© Semantic mapping:

Based on students' responses, draw semantic mapping:

- put the main theme, "scary story", in the middle of blackboard
- write students' responses in English within the sub-title: settings (time and place), characters, plot, and so on

This activity help students predict the story components and become familiar with vocabulary in scary stories.

Students' responses convey cultural aspects: What kinds of characters do they imagine? What makes them feel scary? What happened?

This information tells students the differences and similarities between their country and America
while reading a literature.

(d) Use of a cover page:

This includes the title of the story and the cover picture or one of the important pictures in the story.

: The picture and title give students specific cues about the story.

Introducing the cover page, you can ask students specific questions based on brainstorming session.

(e) Pre-introduction of new vocabulary: cloze test or pictures

-sentences with pictures:

e.g. Then quickly she bent over and plunged the knife into the soil.

They found her body sprawled across the grave.

The words, “plunge” or “sprawl”, might be difficult. Given the pictures about these sentences, students predict or imagine the meaning of the words.

2. During Factual Reading Stage for efferent reading: Group Activity in the group of 5 or 6, depending on your class size.

- During factual reading, collaborative learning between peers should be encouraged through group activity.

(a) Arranging the story with scrambled pictures or strips

(b) Constructing the end or the half of the story through group discussion

© Different role to each group: drawing pictures or constructing the story

(d) Changing the role or telling the story with pictures to other groups or vice-versa

3. During Aesthetic reading Stage:

- Students’ experience or feelings should be involved.

(a) Reading the end or the first half of the story to the class

(b) Comparing students’ story with the text

(c) Role play or simulation: assign each role, e.g. characters and narrator to students.
4. Follow-up Stage: This stage involve students’ evaluation or differences between their expectations and the story components.

(a) Cultural differences or experiences:

The following questions might be useful:
What is the most scary one in this story?
What is the most funny one?
How did the story compare to your previous experiences?
What are the differences and similarities between your expectations and the story?
If you were the brave girl, what would you do?
How do you feel about the brave girl?

(b) Semantic mapping:

With the story components, we can construct the components of American scary stories to compare them with the other stories.

(c) Personal Writing can be recommended as a homework assignment about their feelings or experiences.

Theme Unit 2


The Author: Richard Alan Young and Judy Dockrey Young

- Two authors, Richard Alan Young, a native Texan, and Judy Dockrey Young, an Oklahoma, have worked at Silver Dollar City as storytellers since 1979 and are the collectors and editors of the anthology of narratives. Many of the stories come from the Ozark Mountains near whose geographic center Silver Dollar City in Branson, Missouri, is located.

The selected story: “She’s Got Me!”

1. Pre-reading stage:

(a) The introduction of the title: Because this expression was already described in the previous story, the title makes students imagine the situation.

(b) Pre-reading instruction of background information: use of map and pictures about their life
These story collections come from the Ozark Mountains in Missouri, and hence this narrative is one that has been told from generation to generation in this area. The following background information might be helpful:

- location of the area, the Ozark Mountains, the state, Missouri,
- their life and customs, e.g. farmers, a small village, a belief about witches.

This provides students with cultural information of a target community.

© Brainstorming:

- First recall the story told in the previous lesson and ask students to tell the components of the story, “The Girl Who stood on a Grave”.

Because they are given the background information about the setting and the people in the Ozark Mountains, the following questions might be useful:

- After brainstorming previous story, ask students where this story might happen, who might appear in this story, and what might happen.
- Semantic mapping: add students’ responses to a previous diagram

(d) Pre-reading instruction of vocabulary

: the redundancy of vocabulary about characters
- distinction between a sassy girl, a mean girl, a fraidy-cat, the brazen girl versus a polite girl.

Because the story is related to good and bad behaviors between two characters, this vocabulary introduction informs students the idea about the main theme embedded in this story.

2. Factual or Efferent Reading Stage: Group Activity

(a) Constructing the story with pictures:

- Show students three pictures: the first one about background setting, and the second picture about two main characters, and the final one representing the final part of this story.
- Encourage students to recall the end of the previous story the same as this picture.
- Constructing the story

(b) Analyzing the factual information:

- Read the story to the class
- Ask students in the group of 5 or 6 persons to pick up information and vocabulary: setting, characteristics of the main characters, and theme.
- Discuss their conclusions between groups

3. Aesthetic Reading Stage:
(a) role-play or drama with dialogues in the story
(b) writing their experiences or feelings as characters in the story

4. Follow-up Stage:
(a) Cultural comparison between students' country or village and the setting
(b) Semantic Mapping: comparison between the previous story and this story.

© Group assignment: constructing picture stories about the same topic:

The following story structure might be useful (reference): be careful to use the story components based on two stories discussed:

(i) setting: the most horrible place
(ii) characters: the most scary human beings or animals
(iii) episodes: what happened?
(iv) actions: what they do?
(v) conclusions: responses or evaluation.

(d) Story-telling: Based on their picture stories, ask each group to tell their own story.

Theme Unit 3


The selected story: "Like Cats' Eyes"

- The folk believe deeply in omens and portents of death (Emrich, 1972, p. 652). This short folktale tells us what happened before somebody died.

1. Pre-reading Stage:
(a) The introduction of a movie: "Omen"
(b) Brainstorming:

- Questions:
  Do you believe that something can portend the death?
  What told us that somebody will die from the movie?
  Did you hear that your grandparents did see or hear something before death?

© Story-telling and pre-instruction of vocabulary:

- read short folklores to the class (Emrich, 1972, pp. 653-661)
-show pictures while reading them to the class.
-Explain the difficult words, "hearse" and "gravel" with pictures.

These short folklores inform students about American beliefs about omens and portents of death. The short folklores are as follows:

"If a dog howls while looking up, the person about to die will go to heaven; if while looking down, to hell."

"My mother was very sick in bed and we pulled the bed up by the window, and two white doves came and sat on the window until my mother died; and just as she was died, they disappeared and we did not see them again."

"We had a rooster that did not belong to us come and crow in our front door (with his head sticking in the door), and my mother died."

(d) Students' story-telling:
- ask students to tell similar stories to the class
- cultural comparison
- writing them on the blackboard

2. Factual and Aesthetic Reading:
(a) Reading a story to the class
- Encouraging one volunteer to read this story.
(b) Questions: Group activity- answer the following questions
- What does it mean, "cats' eyes"?
- Who do you think "the men" are?
- Why do you think that Jim Brand died?

© Discussion: different opinions

3. Follow-up activity: Homework Assignments
(a) ask students to bring similar stories next time: ask parents or grandparents
(b) discuss their stories

© cultural comparison between American folktales and students' stories

Theme Unit 4

Young, R. A. & Young, J. D. (1991). Ghost stories from the American Southwest.: A
collection of over 100 spine-tinging tales. Little Rock, Arkabsas: August House INC.

Author: Richard Alan Young and Judy Dockrey Young

- Two authors, Richard Alan Young, a native Texan, and Judy Dockrey Young, an Oklahoma, have worked at Silver Dollar City as storytellers since 1979 and are the collectors and editors of the anthology of narratives. Many of the stories come from the Ozark Mountains near whose geographic center Silver Dollar City in Branson, Missouri, is located.

The selected story: “Last Kiss”

The most famous of the American urban legends, this story is called “The Vanishing Hitchhiker,” and is told in hundreds of variations in every state in the United States. One of the variations, “Last Kiss”, comes from many informants and sources in Texas and Oklahoma (P. 165).

1. Pre-reading Stage:
(a) Brainstorming: Generating Questions

-When you meet someone in the dark, near the graveyard, or someplace which students mentioned (story construction in the theme unit 2), how would you feel then?
-When you are walking in the scary places alone, how would you feel?

(b) Pre-reading instruction of vocabulary: cloze test

The following examples can be used because the contexts give students cues what the new words mean:

-He almost couldn’t speak, she was so pretty. He (mumbled) something and she smiled. (linguistically difficult word)
-“If you do not believe me,” she replied, “go look in the (cemetery), there. Her tombstone is in the third row.” (both linguistically and culturally)

because students seldom understand why the graveyard is located near the church.

2. Factual Reading Stage and Aesthetic Reading Stage: Group Activity

(a) Construct “script story” with pictures which represent each scene of the story.

(b) Arrange the sequences of the story.

(c) Semantic Mapping:
3. Follow-up Activity:

(a) Write something strange in the story in the journal:

  e.g. How can the dead appear in the street?

  A teen-age boy’s driving car (American) versus walking street (Korean)

(b) Discussion: cultural similarity and differences

(c) Writing a letter to the author based on your questions

**Theme Unit 5**


The selected story: “The Bus Stop”

1. Pre-reading Stage:

(a) Brainstorming: recall the previous story

  - What happened in the story?
  - Who are the main characters? And describe the characters.
  - When or where was the dead killed?

(b) Pre-background information: the title and the location, “Farmington”

2. Factual and Aesthetic Reading:

(a) group activity:

  - find similarity and differences between this story and previous one.

(b) constructing comparison chart based on the story components

3. Follow-up activity:

(a) Group assignment: constructing picture stories about the same topic:

The following story structure might be useful (Sadow, 1982): be careful to use the story components based on two stories discussed:

(I) setting:
(ii) characters:
(iii) episodes:
(iv) actions:
(v) conclusions
(b) drama

© post-writing (Spack, 1985)

: summarization and writing their feelings or generating questions

for example: Who do think the girl is?

Is it possible for the dead to get out of graveyard?

What is your answer or reaction to that?

What is the most scary character in the story or the funny one?
References


I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

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