

A Classroom and LL Use of a Story to Teach  
the Implications of Language.

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The usual way to use a story in language classes is to read all or most of the story and then to ask questions about it. Another method often used is to ask the student to retell the story. While these methods have their uses, other methods should be used if we want to teach the student the implications of the language he reads or hears.

In this paper, I intend to take up two possible methods of using a story to make the student answer "Why?" questions rather than the easier "Who?", "What?" or "How?" type questions.

The main purpose of the two methods discussed below is to make the student concentrate on what he reads and get him to *infer* the course of the story from what he has already read or heard.

It will be noted that only if the student really understands the meaning of what he has read can he select the correct answer.

*Classroom use of the story*

The student studies by himself by reading part of the story and then answering a question based on that part. He is given two or more alternatives from which he selects an answer. He then goes to the indicated paragraph and is told whether he is right or not. If he is correct, the next part of the story is given to him. If he is wrong, he is told so and usually given the reason why his answer is wrong and then he is directed back to the original paragraph to select again. He should also be told by the teacher before starting the reading that he should re-read the paragraph after making a mistake if he feels unsure of the answer.

*The Case of the Posioned Mushrooms<sup>1</sup>*

1. Miss Johnson was a char-but it is more polite to call her a 'daily help.' She used to help Mrs North in the house, cleaning the floors, polishing the furniture and so on. She had worked for the Norths for over ten years.

One morning she arrived-as usual-at half-past eight and the the door was locked. How strange she thought. Mrs North is always up by half-past eight. She rang the bell, but there was no answer.

Now, Miss Johnson had a strong sense of duty, so what did she do?

- (a) Did she go home? If you think she went home, look at paragraph 7.
- (b) Did she try and find out what was wrong? If you think she did this, look at paragraph 9.

2. Yes, the fact that Mrs North seemed to have died in the middle of breakfast is useful piece of evidence. It *may not* be significant, but the policeman is right to think that it is significant at the moment.

Now go on to paragraph 11.

3. Yes, Miss Johnson was frightened and wanted help. So she ran along the road to the call box and phoned them.

Ten minutes later Sergeant Grey arrived at the North's house, forced the door open and went into the kitchen. Miss Johnson followed him in. There were no obvious clues to suggest what had happened.

'Don't touch anything,' said Sergeant Grey as he knelt down to look at Mrs North's body. 'Yes,' he said at last,...

What did the policeman say?

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1. I am deeply indebted to A.P.R. Howatt, *Programmed Learning and the Language Teacher*, Longmans, London, 1969 for much of what appears in this paper.

- (a) 'She's been murdered.' If you think this, look at paragraph 10.
  - (b) 'She's committed suicide.' If you think this, look at paragraph 6.
  - (c) 'She's dead'. If you think this, look at paragraph 8.
4. If something is 'insignificant', it is not very important, it does not mean very much.

Now, the fact that Mrs North had not finished her breakfast suggests that she quite possibly died in the middle of it. This *may not* be significant, but the policeman would not be doing his job properly if he thought it was insignificant at this point in the story.

Now go on to paragraph 11.

5. Miss Johnson could have broken the window and got into the house, of course. It is not very difficult. But remember that Miss Johnson was frightened, she wanted help.

So, go back to paragraph 9 and choose again.

6. If you commit suicide, it means that you kill yourself. Suicide is often difficult to prove and remember-there were no *obvious* clues to suggest what had happened. An obvious clue that someone had committed suicide would be a strong smell of gas, for example.

The policeman had not got enough information, enough evidence, to say 'She's committed suicide.'

So turn back to paragraph 3 and choose again.

7. You think she went home. Some people would go home and have a free day. But Miss Johnson had a strong sense of duty-she always tried to do the right thing.

Go back to paragraph 1 and choose again.

8. 'She's dead.' Yes, the policeman had not got enough evidence, enough information, to say 'She's been murdered.' or 'She's committed suicide.' There were no obvious clues to suggest

what had happened; there was no obvious evidence. Obvious evidence of murder would be a bloody knife, for example, and obvious evidence for suicide might be a strong smell of gas. But there was *no* obvious evidence.

While Miss Johnson phoned for a doctor, Sergeant Grey looked round the kitchen. Mrs North's breakfast things were lying on the table-she had just finished a plate of bacon, eggs and fried mushrooms. The empty tin was in the sink with the tin-opener beside it. Her coffee cup was half-empty and she had not finished her toast and marmalade.

What did the policeman think about this evidence?

(a) He thought it was significant.

If you agree, look at paragraph 2

(b) He thought it was insignificant.

If you agree, look at paragraph 4.

9. Yes, she tried to find out what was wrong. She was a very conscientious woman-she had a strong sense of duty-and she thought it her duty to help.

So she went round to the back of the house and looked in through the kitchen window. It was rather dark inside, but when her eyes got used to the dark, she saw Mrs North-lying on the floor! Good heavens! What shall I do? Miss Johnson was frightened.

What did Miss Johnson do?

(a) She broke the window and got into the house.

If you think this, look at paragraph 5

(b) She called the police.

If you think this, look at paragraph 3.

10. You think the policeman said 'She's been murdered.' To say that someone has been murdered is very serious and a policeman would have to be sure. Remember-there were no *obvious* clues to suggest what had happened. An obvious clue that Mrs North had been murdered would be, for example, a knife with

blood on it, or a stocking round her neck.

The policeman has not got enough evidence to say 'She's been murdered,' so turn back to paragraph 3 and choose again.

11. 'The doctor's coming in a minute, Sergeant', said Miss Johnson. 'Yes, thank you for phoning, Miss Johnson. It was very kind of you... the lady's name is Mrs North, you say...'

'Yes, that's right.'

'And what about Mr North?'

'Doctor North, Sergeant.'

'Oh, I see... well, Doctor North, then. Do you know where he he is?'

'Not exactly, Sergeant. He never told Mrs North where he was going. You see, they hated each other.'

'What do you mean?'

'Well, Dr North thought that Mrs North was in love with another man, and everyone knows that Dr North went to see another woman.'

'Mmmmmm... how long have you worked for the Doctor and his wife?'

'Ten years. I know everything about them. And they hated each other.'

If you were the policeman, what would you think?

(a) That Miss Johnson was just a gossip?

If this is your opinion, look at paragraph 14.

(b) That Miss Johnson's story was true?

If this is your opinion, look at paragraph 16.

(c) That Miss Johnson's story way likely to have some truth in it?

If this is your opinion, look at paragraph 13.

12. Dr North will say that the firm made a mistake and put toadstools in a tin of mushrooms. He will also say he was away at the time, and so he could not have given his wife poisoned mushrooms. He will also say that he never ate mushrooms

and his wife always did the same as he did. So, what is the point of talking to him?

Go back to frame 10 and choose again.

13. Yes, the policeman could not believe that Miss Johnson's story was completely true. People do not always talk about their marriages so openly. But Miss Johnson knew the Norths very well, she had worked for them for a long time. So what she said was probably true to a certain extent-was likely to have some truth in it.

'What do you know about Dr. North, Miss Johnson?'

'He's a funny man, you know. Very regular-everything must be exactly right. Breakfast at eight o'clock every day-at exactly eight o'clock, not a minute before or after. And he always has the same food: Mondays-bacon and egg, Tuesdays-bacon and sausages, Wednesday-fish...

'What about mushrooms?'

'Mushrooms? Oh, no. Never mushrooms. He never ate mushrooms.' 'I see.'

'That's the sort of thing they were always quarrelling about. Mrs North was not allowed anything different. She had to have exactly the same as the doctor. And if he didn't like something she never ate it either.'

'Did Mrs North like mushrooms?'

'I don't know, Sergeant. Why?'

'Mrs North had mushrooms for breakfast this morning.'

'Oh, the doctor would be very angry if he knew.'

If you were the policeman, what would you be thinking?

(a) That Mrs North had eaten the wrong kind of mushrooms by accident?

If you think this, look at paragraph 15

(b) That Dr North murdered his wife by leaving the wrong kind of mushrooms in the house, hoping she would eat them?

If you think this, look at paragraph 17.

- (c) That you could not be sure whether it was murder or accident.

If you think this, look at paragraph 18.

14. If you think that Miss Johnson was 'just a gossip' and told all kinds of stories about people, you are being unfair to her. Remember she had worked for the Norths for ten years and she had a 'strong sense of duty.' Of course, the policeman did not know her very well, so he could not be sure, but he would be an inefficient policeman if he paid no attention at all to Miss Johnson's story; so turn back to paragraph 11 and choose again.
15. You think that Mrs North ate the wrong kind of mushrooms by accident. You have forgotten that they came from a tin. Do food firms often make stupid mistakes like that? It is just possible, of course, but very unlikely.

Go on to paragraph 18

16. In your opinion, Miss Johnson's story is true. Yes, perhaps. But isn't it a little exaggerated? She said 'Everyone knows that Dr North went to see another woman.' *Everyone* knows?

And don't forget that Miss Johnson was the char. She knew the Norths very well, she had worked for them for a long time-but she would not know everything.

The policeman would be rather foolish if he believed that Miss Johnson's story was completely true.

Look back at paragraph 11 and choose again.

17. You think that Dr North left some toadstools (poisonous mushrooms) in the house, hoping that his wife would eat them while he was away. This is a reasonable idea. But there is one problem-the mushrooms came from a tin.

Go on to paragraph 18

18. Right. At the moment the policeman cannot say if it was murder or an accident. There is the problem of the tin.

A few hours later the police doctor came into the police station and delivered his report. It was very clear—Mrs. North had died as a result of toadstool poisoning.

If you were Sergeant Grey, would you . . .

(a) Bring Dr North into the police station for questioning?

If you would do this, look at paragraph 12.

(b) Go back to the North's house?

If you would do this, look at paragraph 20.

19. You have forgotten that the tin-opener was lying beside the tin. Mrs North would not have needed it if the tin had already been opened.

Go on to paragraph 21.

20. Yes, the obvious thing to do is to go back to the North's house and examine the tin.

Do you want to prove that the tin had not been opened by Mrs North, but by the doctor?

(a) Yes. Look at paragraph 19.

(b) No. Look at paragraph 21.

21. Right, you do not want to prove that Dr North opened the tin. But that he had done something to the tin which his wife would not notice.

Sergeant Grey spent a long time looking at the tin. It seemed perfectly all right. There was nothing strange at all about it.

Then he noticed something—a very, very small hole in the side. He thought for a moment and then he said aloud: 'Yes I see. Very clever. Very clever indeed. But not quite clever enough.' Two days later Dr North was arrested. What is the solution? Remember that the Sergeant saw a very small hole in the tin—this is the vital clue—and that Dr North was a doctor.

When you have decided how the murder was done, look at paragraph 22 to check your answer.

22. Yes, Dr North knew about poisons and the kind of poisons you find in toadstools. The problem was getting the poison into the tin without opening it. Remember the tiny hole? It was big enough for a pin. Or a needle. A hypodermic needle, in fact.

*LL use of the story*

The story could be used in the LL to improve listening comprehension of the type previously described.

It is possible to use this method if a four-track tape recorder is available and providing it is equipped with a counter.

The student is given a sheet with the questions and responses printed on it. He is instructed to stop his tape as soon as he hears the bell which indicates that he is to look at his printed sheet. At this point he must note down the number which appears the tape-recorder counter (dial)

The following shows how the material could be arranged for presentation in the LL.

CHANNEL A

Today you are going to listen to a detective story, but from time to time, the story will stop, and you will be asked a question, in order to decide what happens next. After the question you will hear this sound-BELL-and when you hear that sound you must stop the tape and write down the number on the dial of your tape-recorder. Then you can try to answer the question. There are two answers on your answer paper-one answer is right and the other is wrong. You have to choose the right one, of course. Let's begin shall we?

This detective story is called "The Case of the Poisoned Mushrooms" and is about Dr and Mrs North, who live in London. It begins one morning when Miss Johnson, who helped Mrs North in the house, arrived as usual at half past eight.

Miss Johnson was a char-but it is more polite to call her a 'daily help.' She used to help Mrs North in the house, cleaning the floors, polishing the furniture and so on. She had worked for the Norths

for over ten years.

One morning she arrived-as usual-at half past eight and the door was locked. How strange, she thought. Mrs North is always up at half past eight. She rang the bell, but there was no answer.

Now, Miss Johnson has a strong sense of duty, so what did she do?

BELL

The number on the dial...

(a) She went home.

If you think Miss Johnson went home, switch to Channel B of your tape recorder and continue listening.

(b) She tried to find out what was wrong.

If you think Miss Johnson did this, stay on Channel A, and continue listening.

CHANNEL A

Yes, she tried to find out what was wrong. She a very conscientious woman-she had a strong sense of duty-and she thought it was her duty to see if she could help. So, she went round to the back of the house and looked in through the kitchen window. It was rather dark inside, but when her eyes got used to the dark, she saw Mrs North-lying on the floor!

What shall I do? Miss Johnson was frightened. What do you think she did? BELL

CHANNEL B

You think she went home. Some people would go home and have a free day. But Miss Johnson had a strong sense of duty-she always tried to to the right thing.

So, go back to your place on the dial, and try again.

The number on the dial is...

(a) She broke the window and got into the house.

If you think this, stay on Channel A.

(b) She called the police.

If you think this, switch to channel B.

#### CHANNEL A

Miss Johnson could have broken the window and got into the house, of course. But remember Miss Johnson was frightened, she wanted help.

So, go back to your place on the dial, and try again.

#### CHANNEL B

Yes, Miss Johnson was frightened and wanted help. So she ran to the call box and phoned them. etc.

In this way the story is told with the correct answer switching from channel to channel randomly so that the student can find no pattern for the correct answer channel.

One of the main advantages of using the above methods with a story is that the student actively participates in the story. This will add to motivation and student attention to the material presented.

While the material in the examples presented above may be somewhat difficult for the average student, the skilled teacher can either write his own material or adapt existing material into the suggested format while keeping in mind the vocabulary range of his own particular students.

#### *Summary*

This paper attempts to show how a short story can be effectively organized to elicit student responses to the implications of language. The formats can be used either for self-study in the regular classroom or in the LL utilizing a four-track taperecorder. Since the student actively participates in the unfolding of the story, higher motivation and concentration can be expected.