INTERTEXTUALITY: A SUPERHIGHWAY TO CRITICAL THINKING IN THE READING AND WRITING CLASSROOM.

Type of Presentation:
Demonstration

By:
Fariza Puteh Behak & Norhaili Massari
Faculty of Major Languages
Kolej Universiti Islam Malaysia (KUIM)
Bandar Baru Nilai
71800 Nilai, Negeri Sembilan.
fariza@admin.kuim.edu.my / 012-3252758 / 03-7988453
norhaili@admin.kuim.edu.my / 012-2573457 / 03-7988490

Biography:

Fariza Puteh Behak is a lecturer at Faculty of Major Languages in Kolej Universiti Islam Malaysia (KUIM) in Nilai. She obtained her Bachelor of Education in TESL from Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), and a Masters degree in English (Language and Media Communication) from the same university. Her research interests are the use of literature, media texts, popular culture, and visual and critical literacy in ESL classroom.

Norhaili Massari is a lecturer at Faculty of Major Languages in Kolej Universiti Islam Malaysia (KUIM) in Nilai. She obtained her Bachelor of Education in TESL from Universiti Malaya (UM) and a Masters degree in Literature from the same university. Her research interests are early childhood education, second language acquisition and critical thinking.
Abstract:

One of the major concerns in the ESL classroom is the lack of critical responses/voice of the ESL learners. The "missing voice" brings a gap in the knowledge and language acquisition in the ESL classroom. Among the reasons that inhibit the students' personal expressions are their lack of critical reflections/analyses and their inability to structure their ideas/opinions. This paper will show a technique that combines the use of print (a short story) and visual (a movie) text to generate Critical Thinking and how to use the texts as exemplification materials in the ESL classroom. This is based on the perception that fiction not only engages students and entices them to read, but also builds critical thinking and writing skills (Boyd, 2004). Nuraihan and Zamnah (2004) assert that the background, characters and their motives are among those that invite critical inquiry and interpretation. It is hoped that this paper is able to highlight the potentials of intertextuality to affect the students both at their intellectual and personal levels as to prompt the desired critical response and to later initiate critical analyses and reflections.

Introduction

The use of literary text has been popular in the ESL classroom since 1980’s. Many researches have shown that the use of literary text in ESL classrooms promote literacy among second language learners. Literary text is claimed to offer a distinct world which can widen learners’ knowledge on culture and provide opportunities for learning the lexical and grammatical structure of language (Carter and Long:1991; McKay: 1986; Bassnett and Grundy:1993; Savvidou:2004).
At the same time, there is also a growing popularity in the use of visual text in ESL classrooms. The emergence of this trend is perhaps due to the quest of educators in keeping up with the growing interest of children and young adults in watching television compared to reading literary works (Bronwyn:2003; Gioia: 2004; Eken:2002). Movies are quite extensively used in language learning especially in the teaching of reading and writing. This is due to the fact that movies help to stimulate conversation, encourage close observation and enhance knowledge of organizational patterns (Gareis:1997; Sweeney, 2006). In addition, Wood (1999) claims that “movies provide interesting and meaningful context, which are memorable and capable of developing students’ language skills because of the valid and vivid actuation of language situations it can command”

In our quest, as teachers, to generate an interesting and active classroom environment, it is best for us to combine, adapt and synthesize present options to innovate new approaches and strategies in our teachings. Since the use of literary text and the use of movies in the ESL classroom have proved to be beneficial, the combination of both techniques might provide a new gateway to language learning environment.
Intertextuality

What is Intertextuality?

Literally, intertextuality means the juxtaposition of texts. Hurrel and Sommer (2001) support this contention as they define intertextuality as “the connections, relations and references between texts, media and genres”. In a deeper sense, intertextuality also refers to the cognitive process in making connections between several texts. According to Hlynka and Knupfer (1997), intertextuality is the relation of one text to another in order to get an idea across. In negotiating the meaning of a particular text, students, inevitably, would experience a complex mental process. They will recall similar or related meanings they obtained from other texts as well as their life experiences. After recalling, they would be involved in the comparing, predicting and evaluating processes (Hlynka and Knupfer:1997; Lenski:1998; Hibbing and Rankin-Erickson: 2003). In this paper we refer intertextuality as its literal meaning as well as the mental processes involved in making connections between texts.

Intertextuality of Print Text and Visual Text.

Print text and visual text can be manipulated side by side in an ESL classroom to generate language learning. Even though, some people argue that the use of a movie in an ESL classroom will distort the reading process as the learners will favor the visual representation of the novel rather than the novel itself, some researchers think otherwise. Hibbing and Rankin-Erickson (2003) explains that movies can be used as an instructional
tool in ESL classrooms strategically. Educators could manipulate the visual representation of the novel to fit the purpose of the lesson as a whole.

Similarly, in developing reading skills, Bronwyn (2003) suggested that visual texts can be used as a bridge to its print text. Bronwyn further noted the work of Golden(2001) that advocated “ways to help students practice using analytical skills in considering films and then- we hope- apply those skills to their work of literature”. Kasper (2000) illustrates that the juxtaposition of film and print text help the students to visualize concepts in the print text.

**Intertextuality of Print Text and Visual Text and Critical Thinking**

Making an intertextual relation between print text and visual text could be beneficial to ESL learners especially in facilitating critical thinking (Hibbing and Rankin-Erickson:2003; Lenski:1998; Kasper: 2000). According to Lenski (1998), to comprehend text at a deeper lever, it is necessary for students to make intertextual links between current text and past text. This intertextual link will enable the learners to bring their knowledge from past text to strengthen their ideas in the current text.

Intertextuality or linking texts enables the learners to experience various thinking strategies that are significant in enhancing reading comprehension. Intertextuality engages the learners in complex thinking strategies such as visualizing, making comparison, integrating, predicting and evaluating (Lenski:1998; Hibbing and Rankin-
Erickson: 2003). In making intertextual links, learners would use mental images to decode the words and experience in the print text. Learners also make comparative references between the past text and current text, integrate the knowledge obtained from both texts, predict the outcome and draw personal judgements, conclusions and generalizations based on prior comparison and integration of knowledge (Lenski:1998; Hibbing and Rankin-Erickson: 2003).

WORKING WITH AN INTERTEXTUALITY OF PRINT TEXT AND VISUAL TEXT: *MY BIG FAT GREEK WEDDING* AND AMY TAN’S “FISH CHEEKS”

Material:

1. An excerpt of Amy Tan’s short story entitled “Fish Cheeks” (APPENDIX 1)
2. A motion picture “My Big Fat Greek Wedding” directed by Joel Zwick and produced by Gold Circle Films.

Both texts are chosen as both deals with similar themes. The level of difficulty is also moderate and suitable for lower intermediate to advanced students.

Level

This activity/lesson is suitable for students of intermediate to advanced levels of proficiency.

Skills:

1. Recalling data or information
2. Understanding meaning and interpretation of both print and visual texts.
4. Analyzing information in both print and visual texts
5. Synthesizing information from both texts
6. Making judgements and evaluation regarding the issue
The framework of the lesson follows Gajdusek’s Framework (1988).

**Pre-Reading**

**Pre-reading Question**

*Imagine that you are dating Brad Pitt or Angelina Jolie. And, it is time you bring him/her to meet-the-parent session. Your family is delighted. Your mother cooks a special dinner... *sambal udang petai, gulai tempoyak, ulam raja and sambal belacan. There is no sign of fork and spoon. You look at your boyfriend/girlfriend. He/She seems uncomfortable. But, your family continues eating as usual and seems inconsiderate. How do you feel at this moment of time?

*The situation should vary according to the culture of learners. This is important as the learners should be able to relate to the situation.

**Surface Level Comprehension**

**Level 1**

First, the students will be given the print text which is an excerpt of Amy Tan’s “*Fish Cheeks*” (Appendix 1). Students will then be asked to volunteer to read the text aloud. After the reading session, students will be given the following set of questions.

**SECTION A: Choose the best answer based on the short story.**

1. Why is the author worried about having guests over for Christmas dinner?
   a. Because they do not like Chinese food
   b. Because they will be bored
   c. Because her father will burp
   d. Because they will be disappointed
   e. Because they are Chinese

2. How does she treat Robert when he arrives?
   a. She is happy to see him
   b. She acts as if she does not care about him
   c. She speaks very rudely to him
   d. She goes to her room and stays there until dinner is served
   e. She talks to him all night long
3. What does the father do to embarrass her?
   a. He gives her fish cheeks
   b. He burps
   c. He grunts while eating
   d. He gives her fish cheeks and burps
   e. He grunts and burps

4. What does the mother say to her after the meal?
   a. She apologizes for her father
   b. She punishes the author for being rude
   c. She tells her to be proud of being different
   d. She says that she thinks the guests were rude
   e. None of the above

5. What does Amy’s father offer her?
   a. Tofu
   b. Fish eye
   c. Shellfish
   d. Fish Cheek
   e. Fungus

6. What is accepted as a polite Chinese custom?
   a. Belching
   b. Licking the plate
   c. Grunting while eating
   d. Talking with your mouth full

SECTION B: Discuss the following discussion questions based on the passage.

1. Analyze the way the author described of the menu? What can you tell about her perception towards the dish and the dinner?

   “She was pulling black veins out of the backs of fleshy prawns. The kitchen was littered with appalling mounds of raw food: A slimy rock cod with bulging eyes that pleaded not to be thrown into a pan of hot oil. Tofu, which looked like stacked wedges of rubbery white sponges. A bowl soaking dried fungus back to life. A plate of squid, their back crisscrossed with knife markings so they resembled bicycle tires.”

2. Why do you think the author feel so embarrassed by at the dinner?

3. What does the author realize many years later about the meal?

Adapted from: Amy Tan’s “Fish Cheeks” at readingmatrix.com/cgi-bin/instructors/main.cgi?State=show_quiz2&...
After the print text session, teacher will show an excerpt of the movie “*My Big Fat Greek Wedding*”, and students will be given the following worksheet simultaneously.

When Toula and Ian decided to get married, they went to each other’s house to meet their family. Describe the differences that you observe during those dinners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Toula’s Family Dinner</th>
<th>Ian’s Family Dinner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Deeper Levels of Exploration and Analysis.**

**Extending Activities.**

In this stage, the students will be asked to sit in a group of four and given the following discussion question.

Do you think these two scenarios exist in our country? Discuss the effects of differences in culture in our life? How do you deal with this issue? Discuss your answers in groups of four. You can base your answers on the short story, the movie clip and your experiences.

During the discussion, the teacher should go around facilitating the students generating ideas. It is important that the teacher do not to spoon-feed students with answers, but it would be better if the teacher poses the students with mind-evoking questions based on the print text or visual text., for example, “Why did Mary say that she prayed for a “*slim new American nose*”? What are the differences between Toula’s family and Ian’s family? Do you think they are exclusive to their family or applicable to the Greek and the
American culture as a whole? Why do you think Toula seems unhappy with her family?"
With these, the teacher will not give a direct answer but merely prompts the students to
think about the issue in general.

**Oral Presentation**

After the discussion, the teacher can provide a platform for the students to express their
answers and opinions. To be more challenging, the teacher could open a discussion forum
between the groups regarding the issue with the teacher as mediator. At this stage,
students are encouraged to exemplify their answers with details from the print text as well
as the movie clip.

**FURTHER CLASSROOM SUGGESTIONS**

*Time Management*

This activity is not necessarily be carried out in one go. Teachers carry it out in different
sessions. For example, the print text could be discussed in a single period and the movie
and discussion session can be conducted in a double period class.

*Syllabus Requirement*

Some teachers complain that it is difficult for them to carry out this activity as they have
to comply to a strict syllabus guideline. The good news is teachers are not confined to
only the set of questions provided above. Both print text and visual text could be utilized
still and the questions can be tailored according to the syllabus. Teachers could always
expand the activity by adding vocabulary or grammar activity. Even a writing activity can be carried out in the “Deeper Levels of Exploration and Analysis” level.

**CONCLUSION**

In short, both literary texts and movies promote language learning in diverse ways in isolation. The integration of both print text and visual texts would bring even bigger privilege to students in terms of language learning. The intertextuality of both provides the students a bigger platform for critical thinking.

**References**


11. Gajdusek, L. & vanDommelen, D. Literature and Critical Thinking in the Composition Classroom in Reading in the Composition Classroom.


11
APPENDIX 1

I fell in love with the minister's son the winter I turned fourteen. He was not Chinese, but as white as Mary in the manger. For Christmas I prayed for this blond-haired boy, Robert, and a slim new American nose. When I found out that my parents had invited the minister's family over for Christmas Eve dinner, I cried. What would Robert think of our shabby Chinese Christmas? What would he think of our noisy Chinese relatives who lacked proper American manners? What terrible disappointment would he feel upon seeing not a roasted turkey and sweet potatoes but Chinese food? On Christmas Eve I saw that my mother had outdone herself in creating a strange menu. She was pulling black veins out of the backs of fleshy prawns. The kitchen was littered with appalling mounds of raw food: A slimy rock cod with bulging eyes that pleaded not to be thrown into a pan of hot oil. Tofu, which looked like stacked wedges of rubbery white sponges. A bowl soaking dried fungus back to life. A plate of squid, their back crisscrossed with knife markings so they resembled bicycle tires. And then they arrived --- the minister's family and all my relatives in a clamor of doorbells and rumpled Christmas packages. Robert grunted hello, and I pretended he was not worthy of existence. Dinner threw me deeper into despair. My relatives licked the ends of their chopsticks and reached across the table, dipping them into the dozen or so plates of food. Robert and his family waited patiently for platters to be passed to them. My relatives murmured with pleasure when my mother brought out the whole steam fish. Robert grimaced. Then my father poked his chopsticks just below the fish eye and plucked out the soft meat. "Amy, your favorite," he said, offering me the tender fish cheek. I wanted to disappear. At the end of the meal my father leaned back to and belched loudly, thanking my mother for her fine cooking. "It's a polite Chinese custom to show you are satisfied," explained my father to our astonished guests. Robert was looking down at his plate with a reddened face. The minister managed to muster up a quiet burp. I was stunned into silence for the rest of the night. After everyone had gone, my mother told me, "You want to be the same as American girls on the outside." She handed me an early gift. It was a miniskirt in beige tweed. "But inside you must always be Chinese. You must be proud you are different. Your only shame is to have shame." And even though I didn't agree with her then, I knew that she understood how much I had suffered during the evening's dinner. It wasn't until many years later --- long after I had gotten over my crush on Robert --- that I was able to fully appreciate her lesson and the true purpose behind out particular menu. For Christmas Eve that year, she had chosen all my favorite foods.

Adapted from: Amy Tan’s “Fish Cheeks” at readingmatrix.com/cgi-bin/instructors/main.cgi?State=show_quiz2&...