

Reviewed work:

Short Stories for Creative Language Classrooms. (1993). Joanne Collie and Stephen Slater. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 107. ISBN: 052140653. \$15.00

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Short Stories for Creative Language Classrooms, by Collie and Slater, provides English language learners with eleven authentic and captivating short stories and accompanying creative activities that address all four skill areas: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The stories and activities are all designed not only to educate students, but also to inspire, involve, and intrigue them. The collection differs from other textbooks by providing exercises for the practice of specific grammar or literary points, as well as offering tasks and creative activities that allow the learner to become involved in the story itself, rather than focused solely on language acquisition.

The book consists of eleven sections, each with its own short story and accompanying activities, including pre-reading warm-up activities, during-reading activities, and post-reading "creative development" exercises. All the sections are self-contained. Students or teachers can choose the stories, as well as the various tasks and exercises in any order.

The collection provides a wide variety of themes and styles, which are interesting and relevant to all levels of students. The short stories are complete, unabridged, authentic stories from around the world, with broad themes ranging from loneliness to tolerance, from escapism to family relations. The tasks and activities are excellent, for example asking students to write an "interior monologue" of one of the characters, or to discuss and illustrate the themes of the story (pp. 33-36). There is a wide variety of tasks and ideas, some more structured than others, although all are creative. Students are able to relate the stories to their own lives and background knowledge with a variety of pre-reading and post-reading tasks that have the students fill out diagrams, charts, or checklists about the general theme. There are group work and pair work suggestions that further promote discussion. Also while some linguistic elements, e.g., grammar exercises, are not emphasized, students are able to work directly with the text on activities that focus on new vocabulary or reading comprehension as well as other strategies, such as listening or reading for specific information and inferring information. Finally, there are creative activities that promote production of the students' own language, both written and spoken (e.g., writing a different ending, discussing what the author may be like, or re-titling the story).

Upper intermediate and advanced learners will get the most out of this book, although the tasks and stories are accessible enough for even lower intermediate (as well as native English

speakers) to benefit from the wide variety of tasks and activities. The authors provide these tasks without burdening the student with too much background knowledge or specific "lessons". The themes are broad and general enough for most students to understand without the need to deal explicitly with specific information or lengthy introductions. This is another strength of the book. By not demanding a lot of assumed knowledge about the cultures or literary backgrounds to each story, the book lets the student use their own understandings of the setting and culture as the basis for interpretation. The book therefore stimulates students' involvement, motivation, and creativity. This reinforces the idea that the book is, in fact, interactive and the students must be involved in their learning. Furthermore, the activities specifically prompt the students to relate their reading experiences to their experiences, further strengthening the interactive and student-centered approach. The tasks are also creative and easy to develop or adapt to the specific needs of any student group.

The instructions and layout of the book are very clear and easy to follow, with an attractive layout and excellent use of diagrams and pictures. A cassette tape is also available with recordings of all the stories as well as listening activities. The teacher is provided with 17 pages of notes on each particular story as well as comments on the format, style, and applications. The materials could also be used by the student in a self-access style, with a key provided to some activities and a description of the aims and concepts of the theme. The only drawback to self-access use would be the lack of student interaction and discussion.

With respect to competing titles, there are few textbooks that deal with short stories in a similar interactive and creative manner. For example, *Distant thunder* (Scalone, 1999) provides ten sections with increasingly difficult short stories and poems. However, very little student interaction is encouraged, with most exercises being fairly similar and standard in their style. *English, yes!: Learning English through literature*, (Goodman, 1996) provides the learner with a set of short stories and very traditional grammar and vocabulary activities, which provide little opportunity for student involvement.

Short Stories is an excellent and exciting textbook for any student. The material is creative, intriguing, and involves the learners in their own learning. The book promotes the enjoyment of reading and motivates the learner to apply and interpret the material to their own lives. All four basic skill areas are covered, while no overwhelming focus is given to any specific language point. The students learn through doing. If there are any challenges or drawbacks in using this book, I have yet to experience them. I would whole-heartedly recommend this book as an excellent and motivating textbook for all learners and teachers.

References

- Goodman, B. (1996). *English, yes!: Learning English through literature*. Lincolnwood, IL: Jamestown Publishers.
- Scalone, J. G. (1999). *Distant thunder*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press.