

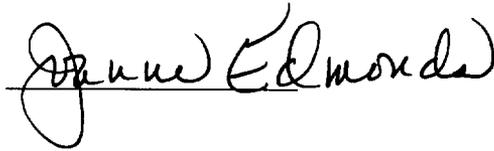
Teaching the American Short Story to Junior Level Students:
A Theoretical Approach, Unit Outline, and Sample Day

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

Shea Kerkhoff

Thesis Advisor
Dr. Joanne Edmonds

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joanne Edmonds". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line drawn through the middle of the text.

Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

May 2001

Graduation Date: May 5, 2001

SpColl
Thesis
LD
2499
.24
2001
.K47

Abstract

This paper on how to teach short stories to junior level students is a resource for education students, English students, and English teachers. The twenty day calendar outlines a short story unit including reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and visually representing activities. The unit includes the students' personal lives, fine arts study, and pop culture. The theoretical context is based on a combination of cognitive, transactional, and social-cultural theories as they relate to education. As an example, a formatted lesson plan of the first day as well as educational text for students for the first day concludes the paper.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Dr. Joanne Edmonds, my thesis advisor, for adopting my orphaned thesis. You are a lifesaver to me as well as many other grateful students to whom you reach out. Thank you for your willingness to teach, your confidence in me, and your thoughts of wisdom. Thank you to all of my professors who have educated, trained, and challenged me.

INTRODUCTION

Traditional literature textbooks are set up as an anthology of literary works arranged in chronological order. The only efferent reading, reading to gain information, students encounter about literature as a subject is in general paragraph introductions on the time period or author and in footnotes while reading the work. Therefore, the literature itself becomes efferent instead of aesthetic, reading for pleasure with a focus on the expression of the author and the experience of the reader. Students need an opportunity to learn about research in the field of English, so they can become aware of diverse theories and see how these theories relate to how our society reads and looks at life. Students should also study the structure of literature to develop an appreciation for literature as an art and be able to evaluate literature for the rest of their lives.

I have researched ways to instruct junior level students about the traditions of stories, elements of a short story, and the genre of short stories. Examples of short stories to be included for enjoyment and study are “The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calvaras County,” “The Story of an Hour,” “The Chaser,” “The White Heron,” “The Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge,” “An-meí Hsu: Scar,” and “Everyday Use.” These stories were chosen to encourage a multicultural curriculum, which fosters academic motivation of a diverse student body. The stories were also chosen because, like students and critics, I enjoy them.

This paper includes instructional prose on reading, writing, and understanding short stories. This material helps build an understanding of where short stories came from, how they exist in contemporary literature, and ways to create them. The goal is for students to understand the criticism of several short stories, to critique the stories

themselves, and to develop an appreciation for and take pleasure in reading and writing short stories. I have formatted lesson plans for teachers to go along with the students' texts.

To activate prior knowledge and motivate by the personal nature of the assignment, students will first dig into their family histories to find the place short stories have in their personal lives. Students will orally share their stories in small groups. Using Elizabeth Stone as a reference, students will analyze their stories to discover a purpose the stories hold for their family. As a bridge, students will read "Everyday Use" by Alice Walker to connect family traditions and short stories as literature. Alice Walker then connects to studying African American story traditions. Students will learn about the history of short stories starting with African American story traditions. Short stories originated in ancient Egypt, so students will thus set off at the beginning of the chronological line of short stories.

After learning the history and cultural context of short stories, students will learn the structure of short stories today. The elements of a short story include many of the same elements found in other genres of literature or forms of art. The students will learn of the similarities including setting, characters, plot, theme, tone, and narrator present in novels and poetry as well, and then learn how these elements can work differently in a short story. Students will also look at other forms of art to discover how these elements, such as setting in painting, character in sculpture, and tone in music, affect the audience. Students will then use this knowledge to learn how to write their own short story using art for prewriting activities.

After studying the specific, students will move on to looking at the short story in its place in literature as a whole. The genre of short stories includes many subdivisions. The traditional short story is commonly studied in high school, but other forms also exist. Oral stories were shared and are now written down as folktales. Many short stories that tell a complete narrative together are called a short story cycle. Fairytales, myths, and parables can also be considered short stories. Students will read and listen to several short stories and actively demonstrate their own interpretations with the class through various media. Much of this reading will be aesthetic reading.

SUGGESTED CALENDAR

Day One: introduction to unit explaining when and how short stories are used in today's society with the family stories as one example

Day Two: share family stories and read "Everyday Use" discussing the similarities and discussing other ways short stories are used in society besides family stories

Day Three: history of short stories and African American traditions and American (inclusively) traditions including characteristics of short stories

Day Four: aesthetic reading of "The Chaser" and journaling to respond to literature

Day Five: plot and sitcoms where students graph the plot of a thirty-minute sitcom to see how the rising action builds to the climax and then is resolved by the end. Sitcoms usually have a simplistically constructed plot that is easy for the students to determine.

Day Six: character and sculpture where students compare how artists create characters, for example *David* by Leonardo and by Michelangelo, to how authors create characters for example in "An-mei Hsu: Scar." Then, students create a sculpture or mobile of the main character to respond to literature

Day Seven: setting and painting where students will compare how artists portray a setting to how authors portray a setting as in "The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calvaras County." Students paint or draw the setting to respond to literature.

Day Eight: tone and music where students will compare how musicians set a tone to how authors set a tone as in "The Story of an Hour"

Day Nine: Native American tradition

Day Ten: prewriting with a short story map including the areas of plot, characters, setting, and tone

Days Eleven-Twelve: writing of an original short story

Day Thirteen: revising and peer-editing

Day Fourteen: study of subgenera including folktales and short story cycles

Days Fifteen-Twenty: aesthetic reading and individual or group activities

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

In order to justify why particular activities and stories were chosen, I will now explain my theory of reading and reading pedagogy. My theory is a combination of three currently accepted theories of reading as they relate to education: cognitive, transactional, and social-cultural. These three approaches have strengths and weaknesses. I will briefly describe and review these theories individually. I will then show how I feel they are best used in combination in high school English classrooms.

The cognitive theory is objectivist which makes it measurable. This makes teaching literature easy because we can grade right or wrong on the simplest level. Reading is seen as a hierarchy, which is easily taught to students. On the first level, the reader/student must master letter recognition. Then the reader/student can move up to higher skills like comprehension. In the schema theory (part of the cognitive theory), if teachers provide students with accurate background knowledge, then they aid in readers' understandings and therefore "teach." However, schema theory causes cognitive theory to be less objective because students could still create different meanings because of their individual schema according to Sir Frederic Bartlett. "He studied the ways in which [. . .] recollections differed from the original story, and proposed that his subjects recalled the story differently because they were trying to relate it, as a new text, to structures of information that existed in their memories before they read the story" (McCormick 18). John Bransford says that the teacher can activate certain schema to get students to a particular reading (McCormick 19). For example, this works for underprivileged students in order for them to understand the majority's reading. This theory can be

applied to all types of reading. Cognitive theory is great because it is easily converted to pedagogical theories and makes teaching look so easy, but there are many problems.

First of all, it implies that there is “a right meaning” and that students need a teacher to come to that meaning. Secondly, knowledge is not content; it is fluid. Teachers cannot give students background knowledge. It would be like giving a person lumber and bricks and saying live here, but the house has to be built.

The problems with the cognitive theory do not exist in Louise Rosenblatt’s transactional theory, which says reading is a personal experience between a reader and a text. The reader is an active creator who lives through the experience of reading. This theory is wonderful in a student-centered classroom, especially one with a focus on literature. It shows that interpretation and evocation are events. Transactional theory allows the teacher to just be a guide of this exploration. Rosenblatt discusses the constraints of the reader and the text in The Reader, The Text, The Poem. She sets boundaries for the territory of literature exploration, so that it cannot be completely subjective. This is good for a teacher who is evaluating reading comprehension. Transactional theory also says that texts bring responses from the readers who chose the relevant meanings.

The problem according to McCormick is that the theory lacks a sufficient theory of what the text is (36.) Rosenblatt also dismisses that there are no logical relationships between the sign (words) and the physical object. The arbitrary relationship is culturally dependent, meaning the rules in a community keep the relationship.

The social-cultural model sees the reader as socially constructed but not without autonomy. We are not determined solely by our ideology. The more a person has

conscious control over choosing which ideology is followed, the more a person determines herself. Still, ideology affects this process as well, and we can never escape ideology. The cognitive process says that reading is a system of thinking that is the same in all humans. The cultural theory says that it is not innate in humans but part of an ideology.

A strength of this theory related to pedagogy is that the theory is extremely broad and can be applied to everything, not just texts. Also, it takes into account the cultural background of a reader and how this effects his or her interpretation. The problem is that there is not enough pedagogical detail in McCormick's The Culture of Reading and the Teaching of English. Also, how can we step outside of ideology and experience another person's ideology to help them understand reading as a teacher? We cannot. We can never get outside of our own ideology.

My theory is not one of separation but of fusing together. I believe that the mind, body, and soul cannot be separated. This theory is backed by theory in the health science world. There are six dimensions of health (well being) that constantly change and effect each other (Hahn 10). For example, if I am intellectually burnt out, I develop a headache that I feel physically. I believe that Gardener's theory of multiple intelligences works this same way. I think that it would be impossible to be musically talented without excelling in musical intelligence, logical to read rhythms, intrapersonal to interpret the personal meaning, and bodily to physically be coordinated to play the instrument. Our society is so into analyzing and labeling, but most theories cannot be isolated in and of themselves. Just as the musician needed many intelligences, so does a reader. The reader uses cognitive theory logically to decode and organize the reading. We cannot

escape ideology and culturally determined stances, so cognitively we create meaning as the educational institution taught us to. The reader needs the transactional theory for the intrapersonal process of reading. When “allowed” to so, the reader can actively create meaning which is the natural way to read. As said earlier, the social-cultural theories umbrella over all.

The pedagogical implications are that according to the cognitive theory, the teacher should allow for experiences, so students can gain knowledge like in the direct reading teaching approach. According to transactional theory, allow for aesthetic reading and for different evocations and interpretations. According to social-cultural theory, the teacher has an ideology, and the students have ideologies. We can use the social-cultural theory to study their responses to reading.

DAY ONE: INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

“The Stories in my Life”

Take a moment and think about your family. Who do you consider family? Where did they come from? What have they gone through? How many generations back can you think of? How did they make you who you are today? People research their family to answer these questions, especially the last one. A need to know why we are like we are and how we fit in this world has become apparent in today's society by the reuniting of families on television and the many websites to trace your roots. On the Internet, we can trace the names and dates in our genealogical history, but the family stories give this history character. Once upon a time, many families were similarly structured and lived close together, if not under the same roof. Then families became separated through immigration. Now our society is fast paced and people move often. High divorce rates cause families to split up. Grandparents often move south for the warm weather. Every family is different. You may consider your family your grandparents, a close adult friend that cares for you, your uncle, or your stepmother. The list could go on and on and families may change over the years.

For people who do not know their biological family members, the loved ones that surround them, care for them, and are considered their family members are the people who share the stories. Often people who are adopted search for their biological parents for the same reasons that people research their family history, because of the need to know where we come from and why we act and look the way we do (Stone 8).

Even to people who do not like their family, the stories are valuable because they show every single person where they have come from. “The particular human chain

we're part of is central to our individual identity" (Stone7). Once a value system is taught, then people can shape it into how they feel as an individual, either to embrace it or reconstruct it. The stories give us role models that are real people even if we only know them in our imagination because we have never met them.

Families do not spend the time together that they used to listening to stories about family members or events at the dinner table or on the front porch swing. "The family's survival depends on the shared sensibility of its members" (Stone 7). Family stories help us build an identity and develop a value system. "It's through these stories we learn to be accepted for who we are and learn a sense of belonging – not because of the kind of tennis shoe we wear – but because we are part of a unique family" (Center 1).

Many memories or recollections can be considered family stories as long as they are retold. Family stories can be old or new, some are bare plots, and some are characterizations (meaning they show the personality traits of the person as well as how the person looked and acted.) The stories can be long and detailed or just a few sentences. The definition of a family is story is a story that matters to the family (Stone 5).

There are many reasons why stories matter to families and to individuals. Think back on your childhood up until this point in your life. Can you think of any family stories? Jot down the gist of those stories on the next page. They can be ancestral or stories you've been told about yourself.

My Stories:

If you cannot think of any, ask yourself these questions from the [Story Arts WebPages](#) and write down any responses on the previous page.

Where was your favorite place to visit as a child?

Who lived in your house with you as a child?

Can you describe your father or mother as you remember them as a child?

Are there any relatives you remember: grandparents, aunts, or uncles?

Did anyone in the family have some unusual characteristics?

Did you have any special holiday customs or foods?

How did you get your name?

Do you remember hearing about your firsts: first word, first step, etc.?

What do you remember your grandparents talking about?

Typical subjects of the stories include love, school, the Depression, first cars, humor, jobs, war times, first uses of technology, and holidays. Subjects are often of two categories. The first is the family itself. These stories give us a sense of belonging because we can relate to family members we hear about. Also, we can strive to be like the successful people in our family. It has happened before, so it can happen again. The second is the members as they related to the world of people and events they encountered. This is where the stories teach us what our family believes in (our value system). These stories can be happy or sad, but they usually encourage us to be better people.

Family Story Subjects

	Family in Itself	Family in the World
Subjects:	Love Holidays Humor Babies Characterizations Discipline Deaths Houses Vacations Heirlooms Favorites Pets	School The Depression Jobs and work War times First uses of technology Friends Success and failure Television or movies Sports The Arts Politics Religion

Can you add more subjects under each heading? Think of stories you remember hearing and categorize them. If the story involves only members of the family put the subject of the story in the first column. If the story's subject involves how the family interacted with the world (or community, or society) place it in the second column.

Storytelling starts at a very early age in a child's life. My first memories of my grandma are as she tucked all three of us kids into her bed and pulled the thick green comforter up to our little chins. We begged her to tell us a story, so she would untuck us and sit in the middle of the bed with the three of us cuddled around her anticipating. I only remember two stories, but I think they were our favorites because they were funny. She told them to us over and over. Even though we knew the stories, we would still want to hear them again.

"The Pickle Jar Story"

My great-grandmother lived on a farm about ten minutes away from my grandma's house. Every time my grandma would go over there, her mom would give her food (you know how moms are!) My great-grandmother made the best candied pickles. They were sweet and tangy with a fun bright green color. My grandmother accepted a jar of these delicious pickles. While trying to get all four kids in her car when she was leaving the farm, my grandma put the jar of pickles on the roof of her car. Of course in all the commotion of "she's touching me" and "are we there yet", my grandma forgot all about the jar on top of her car. She drove around the curve, over the hill, across the railroad tracks and finally was driving through Mulberry (a town on her way home.) Everyone was honking and waving, and my grandma thought that the townspeople were awfully friendly that day. She smiled and waved back to every single person.

Then, we she got home and out of her car, she realized why they were all honking. There was the jar of pickles sitting on top of the car! They made it all the way home, even over the railroad tracks.

Later in my life, my maternal great-grandmother told our whole family a story. My dad found the story fascinating and would retell the story to our dinner guests, my friends, and whoever else would listen! I now find myself telling people outside my family this story.

"Automobiles Are Just a Fad that Will Never Replace the Horse and Buggy"

My same great grandmother's father was a very successful businessman. He owned a threshing machine and would travel around and thresh farmers' wheat fields all over northern and central Indiana. All the farmers in a community would helped each other with the threshing. (My great-grandmother would add, and us women had to cook a huge lunch for all of them when they were at our house.) Henry Ford, another successful businessman of the time, approached my grandfather about becoming a partner with him in a new machine business called the automobile. He explained to him that this machine could transport people. My grandfather said that automobiles would just be a fad and they would never replace the horse and buggy. He

declined the offer to become a partner in the Ford automobile company. Well, my grandfather was wrong. Automobiles certainly did replace the horse and buggy. Who knows, if he would have said yes, they might have been called Ford and Hufford's and our whole family would be rich!

Assignment: Pick one of the stories you thought of and interview a family member to gather more details about the story. Remember to ask for the setting (the time, location, and environment), the plot (the events, actions, and conclusion), and the characters (the people). Try to read the family member's emotions or attitudes caused by the story.

Read Mark Twain's "How to Tell a Story." Share your story orally with another family member to practice storytelling. Did you give a clear setting, plot, and character description? Did you include your emotions and attitudes caused by the story?

DAY ONE: TEACHER'S LESSON PLAN

Objectives:

- The teacher tells an anecdote to model what students will do tomorrow and arouse interest by curiosity.
- The students read Day 1 text to build background knowledge of family stories.
- Students will write about stories they remember to begin thinking about the place stories hold in their lives.
- Students will discuss with the whole class to gain more understanding of family stories by hearing from people outside of their own family.

I. Introduction

The teacher shares a personal family story with the class. Then the teacher explains how this story was told to him or her and what it means to his or her family.

II. Text

Students read Day 1 of their manual and begin the prespeaking activity of writing down the parts of the family stories they remember individually.

III. Whole Class Discussion (many answers are possible for each question)

- A) What makes family stories last? (they matter to the family because of belonging and value systems)
- B) What kinds of information can be considered a family story? (anything: old, new, short, long)
- C) What subjects were your stories about? Besides the ones in the chart, what other subjects can you think of?
- D) What is valuable about passing down stories? Besides family stories, what other stories can be passed down to generations? (bedtime, fairy tales, myths, folktales)

- E) We've talked about stories, what other ways do families use to record or pass down history meaning to show values or learn about other family members? (photographs, holiday traditions, heirlooms, for more information on this subject consult A Celebration of Family Folklore. Smithsonian Institute, 1992, Pages 182-211.)
- F) What lessons have been taught to you through family stories?

IV. Handouts

Distribute students' handouts and explain that the handouts will help the students create their oral story.

V. Assignment

Read the assignment in your text. You will prepare to share a family story orally to a small group tomorrow. This means interviewing a family member and practicing the story. This is a speaking activity, so you cannot just read the story but you may use notes, an outline, or a picture to help you remember. Also, read "How to Tell a Story" a humorous essay by Mark Twain.

V. Assessment

Students will be assessed by their peers in their group by the following rubric.

Students should receive a copy of the evaluation before they prepare their story.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

Storytelling Rubric

	Exemplary	Proficient	Not yet proficient
Plot	All of proficient plus: Unpredictable ending Twists and turns of events that make sense	Logical order of events Clear cause and effect Rising action, climax, and resolution	Rising action, climax, and resolution
Setting	All of proficient plus: Environment	Date Time Location	Location
Characters	All of proficient plus: At least one description of all the characters	Physical description of main character Personality description of main character Emotions revealed of the characters	Physical description of the main character,
Delivery	Memorized	Used notes or outline for memory aids	Had whole story in front during telling
Speaking	All of proficient plus: Conveyed emotion through voice	Spoke clearly, loudly, and slowly	Spoke clearly
Body language	All of proficient plus: Acted out parts of the story Included props	Moved head Used facial expressions that complimented the story Used hand gestures that complemented the story	Used facial expressions that complemented the story
Eye Contact	Looked everyone in the eyes	Looked at at least half of the people in the eyes	Looked right above most everyone's eyes
Extra Comments:			

	Exemplary		Proficient		Not yet proficient	
Circle the number you feel the speaker deserves based on the words in the rubric						
Plot	10	9	8	7	6	5
Setting	10	9	8	7	6	5
Characters	10	9	8	7	6	5
Delivery	10	9	8	7	6	5
Speaking	10	9	8	7	6	5
Body language	10	9	8	7	6	5
Eye Contact	10	9	8	7	6	5

Best part of the storytelling was

Storytelling

Storytelling is an ancient tradition found in almost every culture including American Indian legends, Aboriginal stories of the dreaming, and New Testament parables. Storytelling began as a teaching tool. Elders passed down information, such as how to survive and what makes a good person. Stories were also told to explain events in nature; a popular story in many cultures is the creation story. Storytelling was not just important because it was the primary way to pass information down through the generations, but it was also a main form of entertainment.

When you tell your story, be sure to speak clearly, loudly, and slowly, so the audience can hear your information. Secondly, use appropriate body language, eye contact, and your voice to convey emotion to entertain your audience. The list below will clarify these hints to effective storytelling.

- Speak clearly = enunciate; separate your words; pronounce your *t*'s, *d*'s, and *r*'s
- Speak loudly = you should be able to hear yourself; keep your head up; project from your diaphragm; speak louder if background noise occurs; if people are not listening, it could be because they cannot hear you, so speak up; you can also vary your volume to keep or regain attention
- Speak slowly = Take a breath after every sentence; think of the speed to the words in a slow song to get the right speed; remember that you are probably going faster than you think you are; the pace should sound slow to you especially if you are well prepared
- Body language = use facial expressions that match the emotion you are talking about; use your hands to clarify, for example, hold up three fingers when you say three trees and point to your head when you say you had an idea; move your head around
- Eye contact = gaze around the group and look at specific people; try to look at every person once
- Use your voice to convey emotion = vary your volume and pace to match the emotion; think of an image such as sunshine for happiness and try to sound like sunshine; be natural, what do you sound like when you are sad?

Works Cited

A Celebration of Family Folklore. Smithsonian Institute, 1992, 82-211.

Hahn, Dale B. and Waynd A. Payne. Focus on Health. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2001.

McCormick, Kathleen. The Culture of Reading and the Teaching of English.

Manchester, Manchester Univ., 1994.

Rosenblatt, Louise M. The Reader, the Text, and the Poem. Carbondale: Southern

Illinois Univ., 1994.

Storytelling in the Classroom. Story Arts. Available: <http://storyarts.org/classroom/index.html>.

11 November 2000.

Stone, Elizabeth. Black Sheep and Kissing Cousins. New York: Penguin Books, 1988.

Additional Reading

- African American Literature. Austin: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, Inc., 1992.
- Dunning, Stephen. Teaching Literature to Adolescents: Short Stories. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1968.
- Fairbrother, Anne. "Check Out the Real America: Many Hued, Many Tongued, and Many Storied." English Journal. V88 N2, November 1998, 57-61.
- Mann, Susan Garland. The Short Story Cycle: A Genre Companion and Reference Guide. New York: Greenwood Press, 1989.
- May, Charles E., ed. The New Short Story Theories. Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1994.
- Moon, Brian. Literary Terms: A Practical Glossary. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1999.
- Purves, Alan C., Theresa Rogers, and Anna O. Sotter. How Porcupines Make Love III. White Plains, N.Y.: Longman, 1995.
- Tchudi, Stephen and Diana Mitchell. Exploring and Teaching the English Language Arts. Fourth Ed. New York: Longman, 1999.