

## Artwork and Drama Activities Using Literature with High School Students

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### Abstract

Previous research in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) suggests that the use of literature in the teaching and learning of a foreign language can enhance motivation in students. However, literature or literary texts are rarely used during English instruction in Japanese high schools. Given this context, a classroom project for a second-year English class was designed with the aim of making literature as a learning material more accessible to the target learners. Throughout the year of the project, the students were given opportunities to interact with literary texts and activities created by the teachers. This paper describes two experimental approaches (making a piece of artwork and the making of a play) that were part of the project.

ここ数年、外国語教育における文学教材を対象とした研究が多く、文学の読みが学習の動機付けにつながるということが指摘されている。欧米に限らず、日本のEFL環境においても、教材としての文学が注目されているといえるが、高校生を対象とした研究は比較的少ない。本研究はその点を踏まえ、文学の読みが英語の学習動機付けにつながるという立場から、高等学校の英語の授業に文学教材を用いた芸術作品の作成及び演劇という二つのオルタナティブなアプローチを導入し、その効果について考察を深めるものである。本稿では、上述した二つのアプローチの内容と調査結果について述べる。

Previous research in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) indicates that reading literary texts can benefit language development and suggests that the use of literature in the teaching and learning of a foreign language can also enhance motivation in students (Gilroy & Parkinson, 1997; Hall, 2005). Literature is also considered “inherently authentic” and “very motivating due to its authenticity” (Khatib, 2011, p.202). Furthermore, reading literature in the language class can be an enjoyable learning experience (McKay, 2001; Richings, 2012). In this sense, recent studies indicate the potential benefits of literary texts in foreign language learning. In Japanese high schools, how-

ever, little attention has been given to the use of literature and literary texts are rarely used during English instruction (Erikawa, 2004; Ono, 2011). More precisely, there is little explicit discussion about its usage and its potential benefits (Takada, 2006). Given this context, a two-year long classroom project (2014-2015) for a second and third year English class was designed with the aim of making literature as a learning material more accessible to the target learners as they were not given any chances to read literary texts in their first year of high school. For every term in both 2014 and 2015, students were given different activities created by the instructors to enhance not only their English skills but also their appreciation of literary texts. This paper reports on two activities-making a piece of artwork and making a play-that were introduced in 2014 and the findings from student questionnaire responses about their perception of these two activities with literary texts.

## **Methods**

### **Participants and Context**

The participants were 41 second-year male high school students (16 to 17 years old) from a large private high school in Japan. The English course where the study was conducted is a team-taught elective course offered to second- and third-year low-intermediate to intermediate level students. The target students' GTEC scores for 2013 were between 309 and 613, which equals A1-A2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) scale.

During the three terms in 2014, the class met twice a week, with 19 classes for Term 1 and 2, and 13 classes for Term 3. Each class was 45 minutes long. The syllabus for this project was to teach the four macro-skills. However, the focus was on reading, while still incorporating listening, speaking, and writing class activities. To introduce the students to literary texts, graded readers<sup>1</sup> were used instead of authentic texts to ensure a maximum of comprehensible meaning-focused input. Although the ER approach is a solid way of introducing literature, it was only partially adopted for this project. Meaning, it included only four graded readers<sup>2</sup> for this year: one graded reader per term and one as summer homework. For this project, Level 1<sup>3</sup> was chosen as a starting point. The texts were also selected with the intention of arousing students' curiosity and fostering their interest in the reading of literary texts. Along with the graded readers, four different activities were introduced each term: timed reading, story-writing, making a piece of artwork, and making a play. These activities were all related to the readings of literary texts. In this paper, the latter two activities will be discussed. The artwork was an activity prepared for the second term and the play

for the third term. All students were given a post-questionnaire at the end of each term to elicit information about their attitudes towards the introduced activities. The questionnaires for the artwork activity and drama activity respectively consisted of three dichotomous questions asking for a yes/no response and one open-ended question.

### **The Artwork Activity**

For the artwork activity, the class took part in a reading competition called “Oxford Big Read” (Oxford University Press, 2016). Oxford Big Read is a reading competition for junior-senior high, college, and university students throughout Japan, held every year in the fall. The Oxford Big Read rules are simple; read one graded reader and create a 2-D item in the form of a poster, a postcard, or a book cover, include a review and a recommendation in English based on an interesting point about the story. The artwork should also be hand drawn and should be the student’s original work. The teacher registers the participating class, selects the best items and then submits them. The Oxford Big Read awards several prizes too: student prizes, teacher prizes, and institution prizes. We decided to enter the Oxford Big Read competition because it was hoped that with a specific goal in mind (i.e., creating individual postcards<sup>4</sup>), the students would be motivated enough to read through a literary text in class and at home and be ready to work on their artwork in groups throughout the term. As mentioned above, the target learners had almost no experience with reading literary texts in the English class, thus motivation was a crucial factor. However, the students were very enthusiastic about this idea of reading a story and actually doing something with it.

First, for this activity, the students were asked to choose one book from a list provided by the teachers who had selected four books<sup>5</sup> for this term, based on level and total amount of chapters. It was necessary to select books with a similar amount of chapters so that the students would have a similar reading load. Then, every week, students had to read two chapters and complete a worksheet in class using the book. On the worksheet, the students had to describe the characters and their characteristics from the assigned chapters they had read as homework. In addition, they also had to write down a particular passage or quote from the book they found interesting and could later use for their artwork. After reading the whole book, students who had read the same story sat in groups of four or five students to complete a second worksheet which consisted of writing a summary of the story, a recommendation of the book, and one quote or catchy sentence (Appendix A). This summary, recommendation, and quote would become the final text on the postcard. Following the completion of these worksheet based activities, the students could then begin their artwork. A

couple of classes were dedicated to drawing and coloring. After drawing a draft on white paper (A5 size), the students were each given a postcard (100 x 148 mm) to finish their artwork. This process took several weeks. Finally, the teachers chose the best items and submitted them. Figure 1 and 2 are two items that were selected. These are black and white copies but the actual postcards were very nicely colored and exercised significant levels of ingenuity.

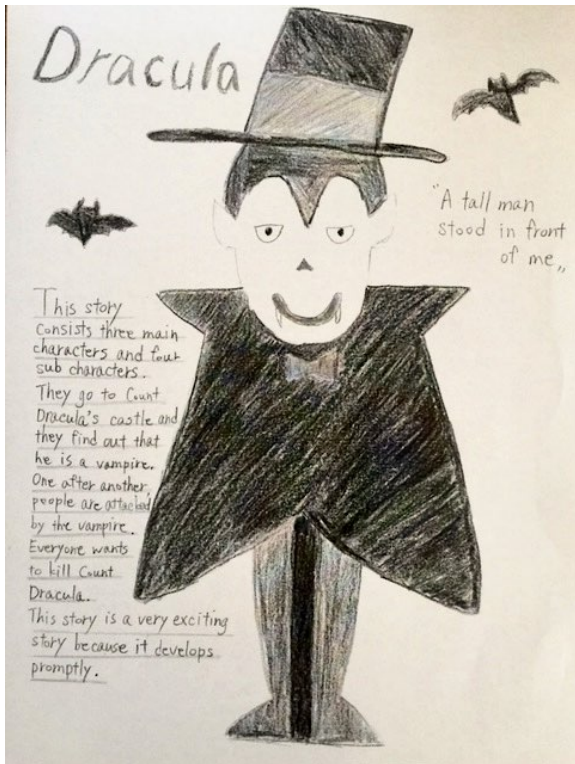


Figure 1. "Dracula"

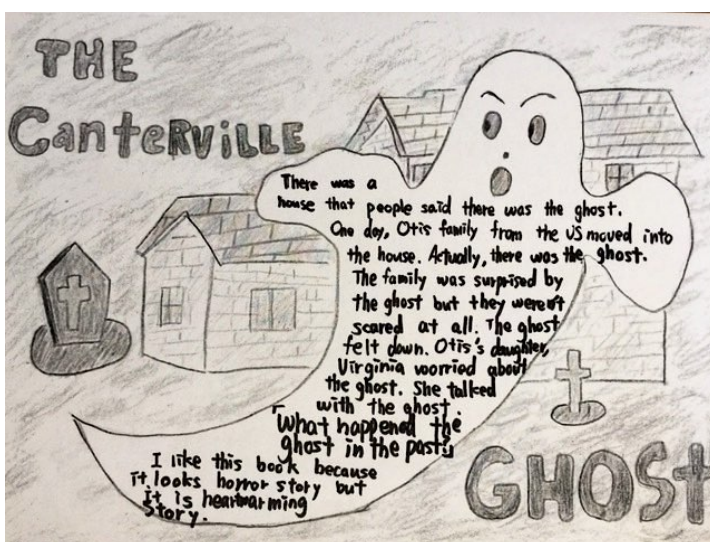


Figure 2. "The Canterville Ghost"

## The Drama Activity

For the drama activity in the third term, students had to create their own story in groups and demonstrate it in front of the class in the form of a play. They also had to read one graded reader as homework, but this time the story was not directly reflected in their play. In other words, the students were not required to use the appointed graded reader to fill in a worksheet as in the artwork activity where they had to use the story to complete the drawing task. The graded reader was to keep the students interacting with literary texts while creating their own story. First, the teachers performed a sample play with instructions on how the activity would be conducted. In the second class, the students were divided in groups. The goal for each group was to make a story by choosing genre, setting, characters, plot, and also their individual role in the play. In the third class, the students brought together their ideas in their groups, discussing the story line (i.e., prologue, event, turn and change, conclusion) and completing one worksheet (Appendix B). Then they had three to four classes to write the script in English and prepare and practice their performance in class (Appendix C). The three last classes were dedicated to the actual performances and discussion. There were 10 groups of four or five students. Three groups had respectively chosen “War,” “Comedy,” and “Education” as their genres, two groups selected “Sports,” and “Romance,” and three groups opted for “Mystery.” Thus, there was variety and originality. Table 1 shows a list of the ten topics decided by each group.

Table 1

### *Topic List*

Group 1	British and German soldiers fight against each other in World War I.
Group 2	Table tennis player Ai falls in love with the tennis coach.
Group 3	Elementary school students make fun of their teacher.
Group 4	High school students in the track and field club fall in love with the same girl.
Group 5	On Christmas day, a husband and wife go to Disney Land. Somebody gets killed.
Group 6	One night, in a convenience store, someone is accused of burglary.
Group 7	Detective Watson knows who is the suspect of a murder but needs more evidence.
Group 8	Bob becomes a soldier and has to leave his family.
Group 9	One day, a man is killed. There are two suspects.
Group 10	Two friends have to face each other in a boxing match.

The play had to be longer than five minutes and each performer including the narrator had to speak at least 10 lines. During the performances, the students were also required to evaluate each other based on the four storyline elements: prologue, event, turn and change, conclusion, as well as energy and memorization. Although some students were nervous, all groups performed their play with confidence and displayed surprising energy. The students also greatly enjoyed watching each other's performance as can be observed from the video. At the end of the term, some students mentioned they had not only enjoyed preparing their play but also watching the other groups perform.

### Results

Unfortunately, there was no winning prize for the students for the Oxford Big Read activity, but looking at the results of the post-questionnaire administered in the last class of the second term, most of the students had enjoyed this activity. As Figure 3 shows, 40 students (98%) liked this activity. Only one student (2%) did not, saying that he did not like drawing. For item 2, *Did you enjoy working on your artwork in class?*, 25 students (61%) agreed, and 16 students (39%) did not. Some negative opinions were, "I don't like drawing" and "I'm not good at drawing." For item 3, *Do you think this activity helped you improve your English reading and writing skills?*, received high affirmative responses with 37 students (90%) agreeing and 4 students (10%) disagreeing. The four students disagreeing provided the following reason to explain why they thought so: "I didn't really feel I learned a lot." Other opinions received for the open-ended question *Freely write your opinion about this activity* included positive and negative comments. Some students mentioned, "This felt more like an art class." "There was too much time for drawing," and "I think there are other ways to improve English skills." On the other hand, some students wrote, "Very exciting lessons," and "Short stories are fine, but this time I thought that reading one long story was challenging and interesting."

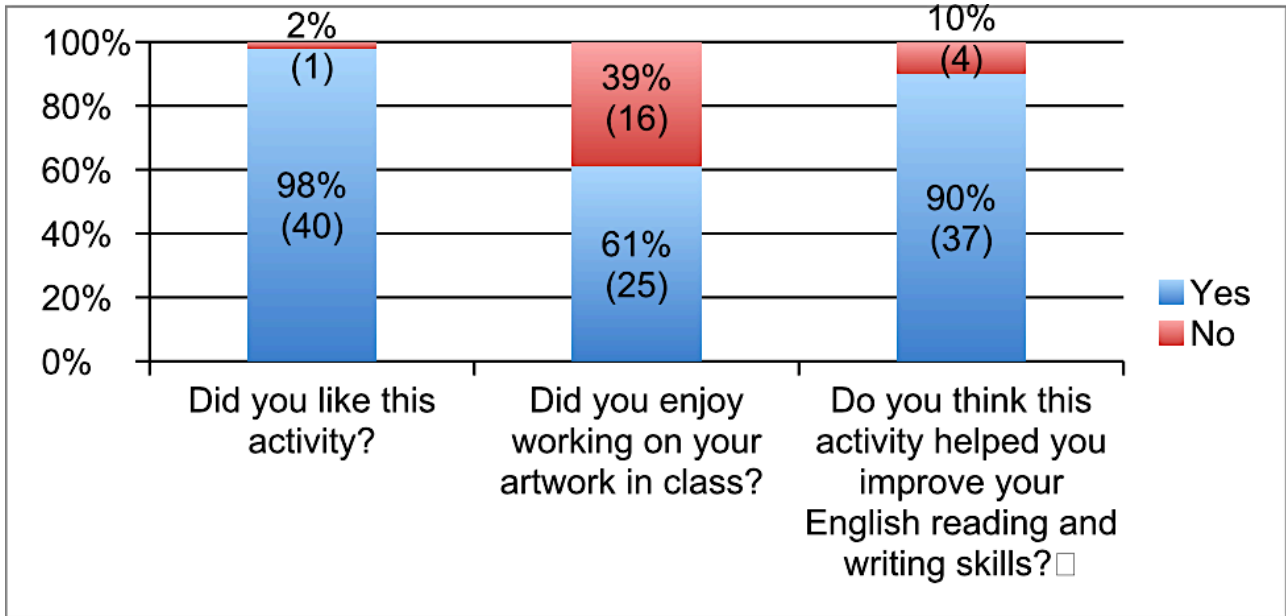


Figure 3. Student perceptions of the artwork activity

At the end of Term 3, when the students were asked if they liked the drama activity, 38 students (93%) agreed, and three students (7%) disagreed (Figure 4). For item 2, *Did you enjoy working on your play in class?*, 31 students (76%) said yes, and 10 students (24%) said no. Some reasons for their negative opinion were, “We used too much class time,” and “Some students didn’t prepare.” For item 3, *Do you think this activity helped you improve your English reading and speaking skills?*, 39 students (95%) agreed, only two students (5%) responded negatively saying that they thought there wasn’t enough time for the teachers to check all the scripts in detail. As for other opinions about this activity, one student thought that there was too much to memorize, and another student thought performing in front of the class was too embarrassing. Also, one student indicated that it would have been nice if they could have watched the video of the plays afterwards. Other positive comments were, “I was really nervous but the result was satisfying,” and “Working on the script really helped me improve my writing skills.”

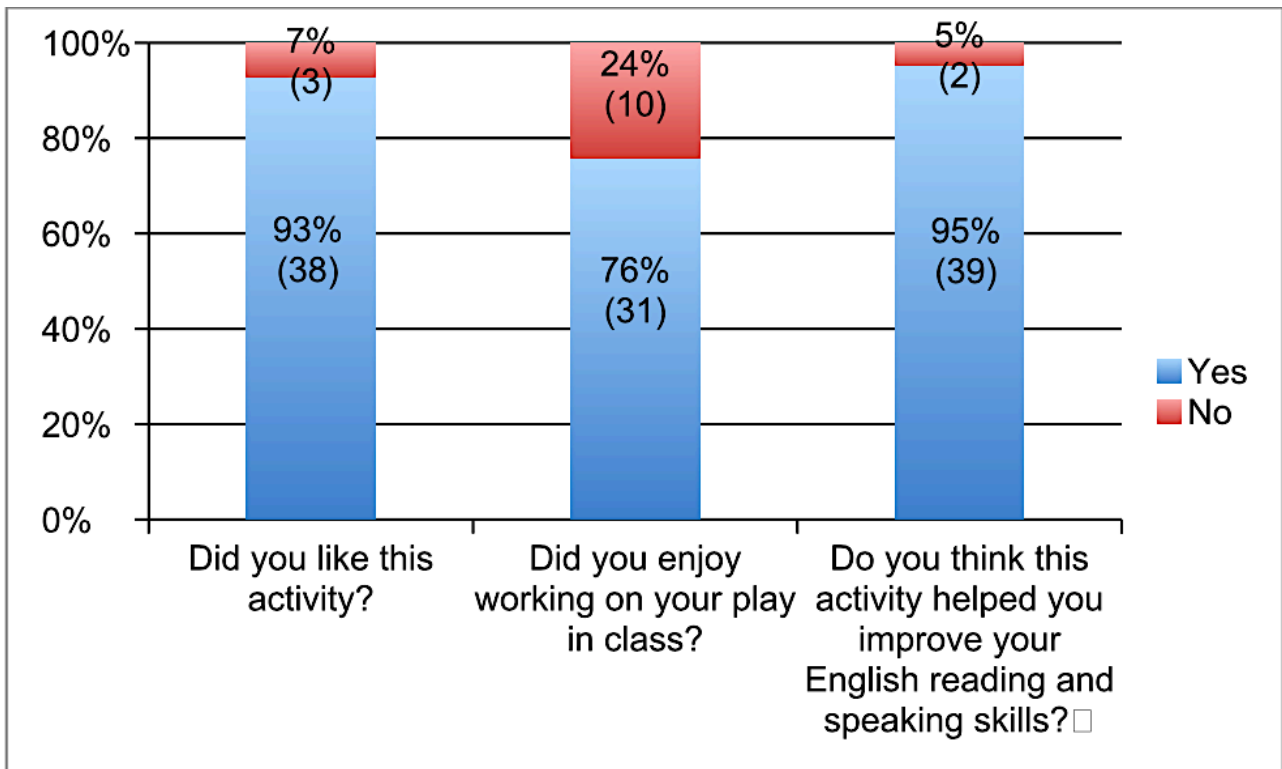


Figure 4. Student perceptions of the drama activity

### Discussion

In all, the student responses to the artwork activity and drama activity proposed by the study were extremely positive, in spite of the fact that most of the students were participating in such activities for the first time. One point to consider, however, is that some students felt frustration during the drawing portions of the artwork activity and the performance part of the drama activity. These impediments are two things that should be examined for improvement of the activities.

Perhaps the most encouraging results about the introduced methods were student comments, such as: “I want to do this activity again” for the artwork activity, and “This activity was really fun” for the drama activity. Also, the results showed that these kinds of activities can easily be related to readings of literature. Not only can students’ reading, but also their writing, speaking, and listening motivation can be stimulated through these activities. But what is most important for this study is that the students could acquire the confidence to read literary texts in class and at home without feelings of boredom or a desire to reject “literature.” Taking these results into consideration, it can be concluded that low-intermediate to intermediate level second-year high school students



may benefit from reading a narrative text after a limited amount of instruction. However, further research in a number of classrooms is needed to conclude exactly what the specific benefits are and improve the quality of the introduced methods. In short, in this paper, experiences of integrating literature into language learning activities in the English class at a Japanese high school were presented and its implications were discussed.

#### Author Notes

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#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Oxford Bookworms Library <https://elt.oup.com/?cc=jp&sellLanguage=ja>, and Penguin Readers <http://www.pearson.co.jp/catalog/pearsons-graded-readers.php?lang=ja>.

According to Nation (2009), although the levels in different grader readers' series are not identical with each other in the number of levels, or the amount of vocabulary at each level, this difference is not considered a serious problem.

<sup>2</sup>“O. Henry Short Stories” (Term 1, Penguin Readers), “The Crown” (summer homework, Penguin Readers), one book from the following titles for Term 2: *White Death*, *Love or Money*, *The Canterville Ghost*, *Dracula*, and *Sherlock Holmes Short Stories* (Term 3, Oxford Bookworms Library).

<sup>3</sup> Level 1 of the graded readers corresponds to level A1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

<sup>4</sup> For this class, postcards were chosen as 2-D item for reason of size.

<sup>5</sup>Two Level 1 books: *White Death* and *Love or Money*, and two Level 2 books: *The Canterville Ghost*, and *Dracula*.

## Appendix A: Summary, recommendation, and catchy sentence worksheet

2014 English Seminar 1: 2<sup>nd</sup> Term

### Writing Introduction / Recommendation for The Book

Title of Your Book [ *The Canterville Ghost* ]

#### Group Members

Leader: Class ( C ) No. ( ) Name ( )  
Class ( C ) No. ( ) Name ( )  
Class ( C ) No. ( ) Name ( )  
Class ( D ) No. ( ) Name ( )

#### Notice:

- 1) Don't write the whole story.
- 2) Don't write the ending of the story.
- 3) Think about the readers.
- 4) Write no more than 5 sentences.

#### ◆ Introduction / Recommendation

1. *Otis family bought a house it was said that the ghost lived in the house.*
2. *In the house, strange phenomenon happened.*
3. *The ghost tried to surprise Otis family but they weren't surprised.*
4. *after that, the ghost was surprised by Otis family.*
5. *Virginia know the ghost's history, and she played for the ghost.*

#### ◆ A Catchy Sentence: A couple of sentences to attract the readers.

*What do you do in the "death garden"?*

## Appendix B: Storyline worksheet

English Seminar 2014 3<sup>rd</sup> Term (Nishimuro & Richings)

### Role Play Project: 2

**Group No. 1**

Members:

**1. Your GENRE**

Romance / Comedy / Fantasy / Sports / War / Mystery / Horror / Daily Life / Education / Others (\_\_\_\_\_)

**2. The STORY LINE**

Prologue	British and German fought <sup>against</sup> each other in WWI
Event	They stopped fighting during only Christmas. Christmas.
Turn & Change	They played together. Play what?!
Conclusion	They fought each other again from <sup>the</sup> next day. <span style="float: right;">Sounds like - comedy as well!!!</span>

**3. Descriptions of CHARACTERS**

Names	• Narrator • Character's Name	Descriptions (age / gender / job / etc.)
	Narrator	-----
	German army	26 age / male / <u>shooting</u> → <del>that about it</del>
	British army	26 age / male / <u>hunger</u>
	British army	26 age / male / <u>pro soccer player</u>

**4. Rules**

- ※1: Narrators: AT LEAST 10 lines.
- ※2: Each character: AT LEAST 15 lines.
- ※3: You MUST MEMORIZE the lines.

**EXAMPLE**

**1. GENRE**

Romance / Comedy / Fantasy / Sports / War / Mystery / Horror / Daily Life / Education / Others (\_\_\_\_\_)

**2. The STORY LINE**

Prologue	Masa and Vicky are talking about job hunting in the cafeteria.
Event	They find out that they will be separated (Hokkaido & Okinawa)
Turn & Change	A bee comes in. Masa hugs Vicky to protect her.
Conclusion	Masa proposes to Vicky. Vicky accepts his proposal at the airport.

**3. Descriptions of CHARACTERS**

Names	• Narrator • Character's Name	Descriptions (age / gender / job / etc.)
	Narrator	-----
Masa	Masa	22 years old / male / university student / becomes a banker and goes to Hokkaido
Vicky	Vicky	22 years old / female / university student / works for a resort hotel in Okinawa They have known each other for a long time.

# Appendix C: Script worksheet

English Seminar 2014 3<sup>rd</sup> Term (Nishimuro & Richings)

## Role Play Project: Script (English Version)

Group No. 1

Members:

- 1 ( ): Bang Bang Bang!! (Others: with their guns ready)
- ( ): In World War I, British and German fought against each other
- ( ): This is a miracle story.
- 1 ( ): This is intensive war.
- 1 ( ): Yes.
- 2 ( ): The intensive war continued for ten days and Christmas day comes.
- 1 ( ): Today is Christmas day. So today is Christmas, why don't we drink together and stop this war
- 2 ( ): Nice!!
- 2 ( ): This beer is good.
- 2 ( ): I made beer in my company.
- 3 ( ): I am a barber.
- 3 ( ): I am a soccer player.
- 3 ( ): Really? OK! Let's play soccer.
- 4 ( ): Before playing soccer, may I cut your hair?
- 4 ( ): Yes sure. Thank you
- 4 ( ): Let's play soccer
- 3 ( ): They played soccer peacefully.
- ( ): After that everyone did funeral of friends who died in this war.
- 5 ( ): They were good people.
- 5 ( ): He was very kind.
- 5 ( ): If this war finishes, we are very happy.
- 6 ( ): We don't want the war.
- 6 ( ): I don't want to do like this.
- 6 ( ): I want to play soccer sooner.
- 4 ( ): That night, They drank beer and talked to each other.
- 7 ( ): Look! There are my family.
- 7 ( ): They are very pretty girls.
- 7 ( ): She is my wife.
- 8 ( ): She is beautiful.
- 8 ( ): If this war finishes, can I visit your house?
- 8 ( ): Of course!
- 9 ( ): I want to meet my family sooner.
- 9 ( ): I have a fiancée.
- 9 ( ): You must go back to your home country alive for your fiancée.
- 5 ( ): They talked until late at night.
- ( ): Another day begins.
- 10 ( ): I have to return soon
- 10 ( ): I don't forget about today. (o Fukuda) The sun is rising.
- 11 ( ): Good Bye!
- 11 ( ): Good Bye!
- 11 ( ): Good luck!
- 6 ( ): The war restarted.
- ( ): British won this war.

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