

## Conference Report

### Teaching Narratives: Intentionally Ambiguous

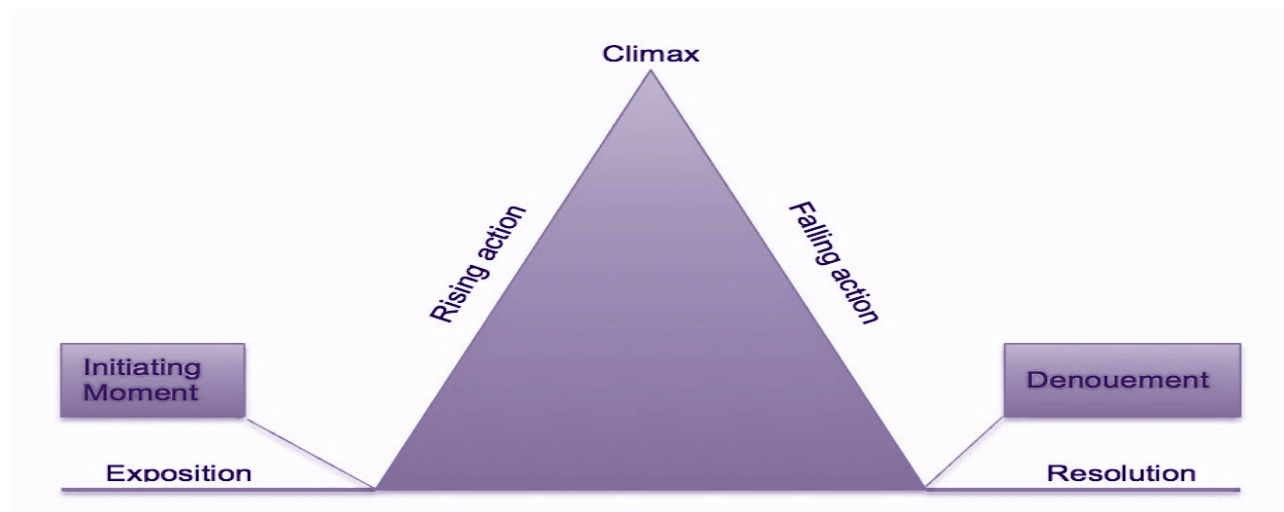
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Stories and narratives serve important functions in human life: listening to stories can bring improvements in vocabulary and grammar (Paul, 2012) as well as increase levels of empathy (Zak, 2014), which has profound effects on the building of character (Kearney, 2001). Furthermore, sharing stories whether orally or in print yields improvements in speaking skills (Hwang, et. al., 2014), overall academic development (Figg & McCartney, 2010), and improved attitudes towards learning (Abdullah, 2012). For reasons such as these narratives and storytelling are important parts of education. The title of this presentation, “Teaching Narratives,” was ambiguous, since the goal was twofold: 1) to explore how to teach narratives and 2) to consider what narratives can teach us.

The first section of the presentation explored the hows and whys of teaching stories or narratives in the English classroom. The teaching of narratives is not new but it has taken a number of different shapes. In order to appreciate the range of approaches one must also decide on the productive focus (written, or spoken) since the language choices and complexity vary in each. Whether it is a story to be told or a story to be read, however, creating a good structure seems to be a universally agreed upon requirement. Figures 1-3 depict different ways to introduce narrative structure.



*Figure 1 Dramatic Arc*

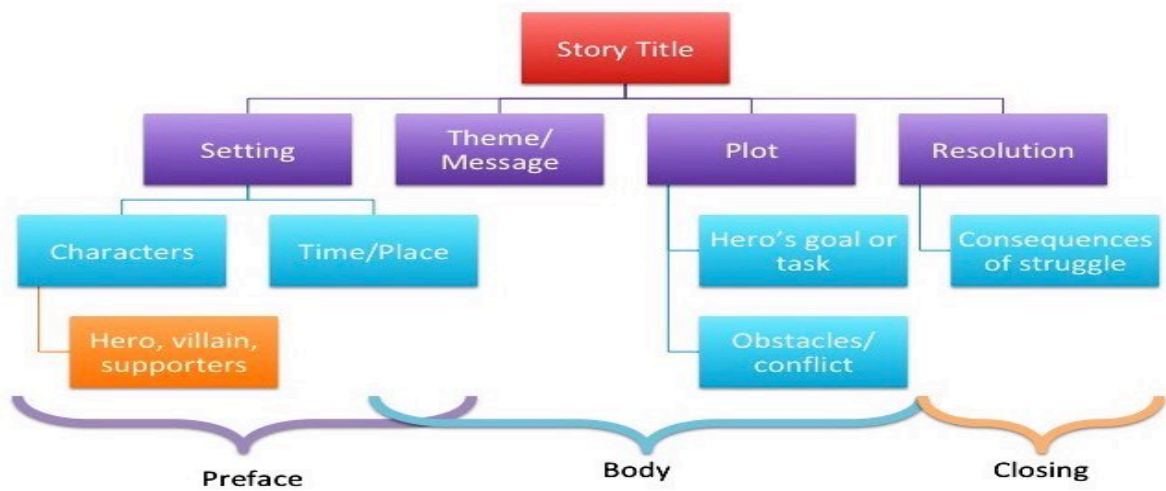


Figure 2 Story Grammar



Figure 3 Components

Other approaches to narrative creation involve prompts—the inspiration for a story or that initial “spark” to ignite writing and telling in a variety of ways. Among the most popular prompt

forms include visual, physical object, random component, initial sentence story-starters and questions.

Transformations or retellings differ from the previous approaches to story or narrative creation in a significant way—they assume the existence of a model or base story (usually well-known) upon which a new story is to be modeled, altered or augmented. Every time a story is retold verbally, one could say that the retelling makes it a new story even though the main story elements stay the same. However, skillful retellings require planning and should be considered creative works in their own right. The possible kinds of changes include setting shifts, character transformations and plot adjustments. The section closed with a short summary of the many ways that stories and narratives may be shared and concluded with a mild warning that the use of technology is never more important than a well-developed engaging story. (See the original paper at <http://id.nii.ac.jp/1085/00001942/> ).

The second section reminded us of the value of listening to and understanding narratives about teaching as told by teachers, students and popular media. It is through the sharing of our stories (and helping others to find their voices) that we ensure continuity in the ELT community. (See the original paper at <http://id.nii.ac.jp/1085/00001946/> ).

### References

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