



# The Journal of Literature in Language Teaching

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## Introduction

### Feature article

A Study into the Benefits of Autonomous Reading of a Novel in an Advanced English as a Foreign Language Classroom

By Niall Walsh.....3-14

### Literature in practice

Creating Opportunities for Authentic Communicative Exchange: Exploring Haiku, Tanka, and Senryu in English

By Meredith Stephens.....15-20

Crossing Borders: Going from Poetry to News before Coming Back

By Mary Hillis.....21-26

Creative Writing in Extensive Reading Instruction

By Cristina Raluca Tat...27-36

## Interview

Iain Maloney on the State of Literature and Creative Writing in EFL

By Jared Kubokawa.....37-40.

## Forum reports

The Author Isn't Dead, Just a Little Shy: Practical Criticism and Workshopping in the EFL Classroom

By Luke Draper.....41-42

Choosing and Teaching Texts of Discrimination and Diversity

By Regan Tyndall.....43-48

## Conference report

Creative Writing in Language Teaching Contexts

By Luke Draper, Mary Hillis, Tara McIlroy.....49-55

## Announcements

Submission guidelines.....56

## Introduction

Welcome to the first 2021 issue of *The Journal of Literature in Language Teaching*.

It's a full issue demonstrating the breadth and value of using literary forms in language teaching. In particular, a number of articles show how analysing and explaining literature from or connected to their own culture in their second language can help students to develop their expressive potential in that second language.

The feature article “A study into the benefits of autonomous reading of a novel in an advanced English as a Second Language classroom” by **Niall Walsh** reports on a study examining the impact of using a simplified version of a classic novel – *Pride and Prejudice* – on students' vocabulary, cultural awareness and personal growth: three areas where it is theorised that literature benefits language students. In particular, the results suggest gains for student personal growth and interpersonal reasoning when reflecting on the nature of love, relationships, and personality.

In the first of our three *Literature in Practice* articles, “Creating opportunities for authentic communicative exchange: Exploring haiku, tanka, and senryu in English”, **Meredith Stephens** shows how the task of explaining short-form poems written in their native language gives students genuine communicative opportunities as well as heightened awareness of the potency of poetry. These gains in turn support student composition in English as well as general engagement in literature. In “Crossing borders: Going from poetry to news before coming back”, **Mary Hillis** explains an exercise where students compare a Japanese poem translated into English and the news story which inspired it. By comparing the poetic and journalistic accounts, students are then in a position to emulate the original poet and compose poems in English based on English language news sources. In “Creative Writing in Extensive Reading Instruction”, **Cristina Tat** details a course in which student creative writing was used to improve engagement with extensive reading texts, including a better appreciation of the structure and development of story as a form. This paper is also valuable as an example of adapting instruction to the Emergency Remote Teaching conditions of the Coronavirus pandemic.

In his interview with **Jared Kubokawa** on “The state of literature and creative writing in EFL”, the author and teacher Iain Maloney reflects on his successful efforts to demonstrate the popularity of second-language creative writing to his institution, on the motivating impact of creative writing, and on which of his own works would work best for an EFL classroom. In summaries of their forum presentations at the 2020 JALT International Conference online in November, **Luke Draper** explains the use of “practical criticism” as a strategy for overcoming student reticence in peer feedback, while **Regan Tyndall** reports on how well-chosen literary texts can encourage students to challenge their ideas on prejudice and discrimination while avoiding stereotypes.

Finally, **Luke Draper**, **Mary Hillis**, and **Tara McIlroy** provide a conference report on the one-day event “Creative Writing in Language Teaching Contexts” hosted by the Literature in Language Teaching Special Interest Group in association with Tokyo JALT. In addition to the summaries of five papers presented on the use of CW in language teaching, they discuss the logistics of moving online due to the pandemic, as well as the positive opportunities for more active audience engagement provided by that move.

Finally, a reminder that the peer-reviewed *Journal of Literature in Language Teaching* accepts submissions from around the world. Submissions are accepted at any time on a rolling basis, although those looking to publish in the next edition should try to submit by the end of October 2021. (Submissions for the Autumn issue have already closed). Submission details are given on the final page of this journal and can also be found on the LiLT SIG website <http://liltsig.org>. Submissions can be sent to [liltjournaleditor@gmail.com](mailto:liltjournaleditor@gmail.com). You can also contact the LiLTSIG at [liltsig@gmail.com](mailto:liltsig@gmail.com).

Stay safe,

Cameron Smith

Editor, *The Journal of Literature in Language Teaching*

The Literature in Language Teaching Special Interest Group (LiLTSIG) is part of the Japan Association of Language Teaching. LiLTSIG was formed in 2011 to encourage and promote the use of literature in the language classroom.

LiLTSIG produces a newsletter and a peer-reviewed journal, as well as organising various literature-themed events.

Although based in Japan, the group and the journal welcome contributions and cooperation from around the world.

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*Feature Article***A Study into the Benefits of Autonomous Reading of a Novel in an Advanced English as a Foreign Language Classroom**

Niall Walsh

*Nagoya University of Foreign Studies***Abstract**

This study examines the benefits to students of the autonomous study of a literary novel that was used as a pedagogical resource in a high proficiency English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. The population of the study was 20 Japanese first-year high school students studying an adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. The students engaged in autonomous reading and were evaluated at different points, pre- and post-reading, on their knowledge of vocabulary, awareness of the culture of the time and level of metacognitive engagement with themes from the novel. Analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data indicated that on completion of their reading, students did not show any consistent improvement in vocabulary and cultural acquisition. However, students' metacognitive capacities such as a realignment of their opinions, appear to have been stimulated through engagement with the novel. These findings, despite being tentative, suggest that to fully realize the value of literature as an ESL teaching resource, deliberate teaching of targeted language and cultural instruction should run concurrent with autonomous activities that can facilitate personal growth.

**Key words:** novels in ESL, culture in the language classroom, literature and vocabulary acquisition

Literature has long been recognized as a pedagogical resource for teaching foreign languages, yet, opinion has been divided as to the merits of its implementation within an ESL classroom. In the early twentieth century, literature was the "uncontested source discipline for the teaching of modern languages" (Kramsch and Kramsch, 2000, p. 553-573). Less than a century later, Edmondson (1997) opined that it has "no special status" in achieving proficiency in a foreign language (p. 45). It is not uncommon for teaching methodologies to fall out of favour over time. The Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and Audio-Lingual Method that once exemplified teaching pedagogies in EFL classrooms are now largely historical artefacts. However, unlike other teaching methodologies long since expelled from the

classroom, literature has recently "regained a degree of recognition as one of the approaches competing for our pedagogical attention" (Maley, 2012, p. 299) and therefore warrants closer examination.

The value of literature in the language classroom is endorsed by Carter and Long (1991). They propose that there are three models for teaching literature; the learning model, the cultural model and the personal growth model. These models, while including a language component, extend beyond language acquisition and present a holistic approach to education that deepens a student's cultural awareness and can stimulate their emotional, cognitive and metacognitive capacities. Language learning can occur as students encounter exemplars of lexical items and internalize grammatical

patterns through engagement with the text. Hudson (2011), Nagy (1995) and Nation (2015), each agree that a literary text can enrich a student's stock of vocabulary and present them with opportunities to negotiate authentic language in use. Research has validated these opinions by finding that students performed better in vocabulary tests after reading a passage from a text than those who had not read the same text (see Day, Omura & Hiramatsu, 1991; Dupuy & Krashen, 1993). The cultural model, which Carter and Long (1991) posit is more teacher-centered, can develop an awareness among learners about foreign societies. For example, while reading Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*, the teacher may elaborate on the hostile relationship between Catholics and Protestants at that time. However, Lazar (1993) extends the parameters of literature's role in developing cultural understanding beyond that of an object of study, to opening doors that foster intercultural understanding as readers unearth, explore and develop a deeper awareness of the cultures presented within the narrative. Meanwhile, the personal growth model posits that literature promotes a student's cognitive development through engagement with the narrative and the various themes that emerge. Topics arising from a novel offer scope for developing interpersonal relationships as students consider, formulate and exchange differing interpretations of the text's contents. For example, Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* could initiate a discussion on the contributing factors to poverty or crime. This process allows students to engage in authentic communication on themes that transcend national boundaries and contribute to a student's personal development (Paran, 2000) facilitating what Hall (2015) refers to as "Education' in short" (p.153). In other words, learning that occurs through literature can build upon the practicalities of, for example, mastering how to order food in a restaurant and enable the learner to participate in authentic conversation with the people around their table once the meal arrives.

Detractors cast doubt on these perceived benefits of literature by arguing that using literary texts warrants no special attention over other pedagogies and may even be counterproductive if they impede the flow of regular lessons. Edmondson (1997), claims that literary texts fail to justify their function in enabling a learner to achieve proficiency in a second language. He argues that other texts can equally introduce culture and stimulate cognitive mechanisms. For example, learners studying for a career in engineering or science may need to

prioritize technical vocabulary and language relevant to their chosen field. Edmondson (1997) continues to warn that in many situations, depending on the style of instruction, literature can be detrimental to learning as it can result in a disinterested classroom. This is especially the case if the EFL class replicates an L1 environment with the teacher lecturing on their personal interpretation of a text for the duration of the class. Lack of enthusiasm for literature among students is a worry echoed by Lazar (1994) who suggests that difficult authentic language and literary abstractions could affect the motivational levels of less proficient students. Hall (2015) also conceded that some educators believe that the language of literary texts is demanding and archaic. Indeed, using James Joyce's *Ulysses* to promote vocabulary acquisition among a group of Japanese EFL students may seem counterintuitive given the amount of contemporary material widely available to educators. These views could explain wider held assumptions observed by Ur (2012), who reported that many language teachers hesitate to adopt literature in an EFL classroom designed to improve communicative ability. Ur (2012) adds that it may even be deemed by some educators a "luxury' item" (p.223).

These conflicting points of view make it difficult to come to a firm conclusion about the benefits of literature in an EFL classroom. However, both factions agree that there is 'a paucity of empirical evidence' that validates the claims made regarding the merits of a literary piece within a language learning classroom (Paran 2008, p. 470). The shortage of empirical studies underpinning theoretical writing is striking given that arguments are stronger if built on informed methodological research. This study, explained below, tentatively contributes its voice to research by assessing the value of literature as a pedagogical resource in the author's EFL classroom.

### The Study

In this investigation, the validity of Carter and Long's (1991) rationale for three approaches to using literature in the EFL classroom is measured against students' autonomous engagement with a novel. Specifically, the study assesses the impact free reading has on students' development with regards to language acquisition, cultural understanding, and personal growth. In an attempt to direct the study, the following hypotheses were tested.

1. Students' receptive knowledge of vocabulary improves after autonomous reading of the novel.
2. Student knowledge of a foreign culture improves after autonomous reading of the novel.
3. Student personal growth is activated after autonomous reading of the novel.

### Participants

The participants were 20 (N = 20) high school first-year Japanese EFL students at a private senior high school. All the participants were native Japanese speakers who had spent one year or more living in a country where English was the language of academic instruction. Because of their experiences overseas, 15 had an advanced English proficiency level of Eiken Grade Pre 1 or B2 of the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR). The remaining five students had never taken an English proficiency test but, based on their scores from continuous assessments within the school, were adjudged to be of a similar proficiency level to their peers that had. The course material, the Pearson graded reader adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen (Pearson level 5; CEFR B2), had been deemed appropriate by the school's English faculty for the reading comprehension of the subjects.

### Procedure

The adapted novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, formed the core element of the course and was delivered over a sixteen-week period comprising 31 fifty-minute periods. All of the reading was assigned for homework with the focus of class time allocated for student-led summaries, critical thinking tasks, group discussions, and role-playing activities related to the story. As the study focused on students' autonomous engagement with the book, activities explicitly teaching specific language structures and vocabulary, introducing cultural aspects of the novel, or delivering teacher-led interpretations of the book and themes contained within were deliberately excluded.

The participants were examined at six stages on their knowledge of vocabulary contained within the novel and at two stages on their cultural understanding of the time period of the novel and their opinions on themes arising from the novel. All students were informed that the results would be recorded for research

purposes only and would not form part of their overall grades.

### Data Collection

#### *Language Learning*

In lieu of a full treatment of language learning, such as orthography, syntax, and grammatical functions which are beyond the scope of this research, students were examined on their knowledge of vocabulary from the novel at intervals over the 16-week course. 'Knowledge' has varying interpretations: for the purposes of this study receptive knowledge – the ability of students to identify the meaning of a word from seeing or hearing it (Nation, 2013a) – was measured. The items to be examined were established from records of the previous year's students' vocabulary logs that identified unfamiliar or difficult vocabulary from the same graded reader novel. The book was divided into three seven-chapter sections, beginning with Chapter 8. Chapters 1 through 7 were omitted due to the absence of vocabulary logs from the previous year's students. Receptive knowledge of the vocabulary of each section was tested through two different synonym and definition matching quizzes pre- and post-reading. Each quiz contained ten randomly selected lexical items from the targeted chapters (see Appendix A). In line with Schmitt's (2010) advice for assessing vocabulary items and improving validity, the synonyms and definitions were compiled of higher frequency words than the ones being examined.

#### *Cultural Understanding*

Cultural knowledge of the time of *Pride and Prejudice* around the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 19<sup>th</sup> century was assessed through an identical True or False quiz, which was administered both before and after students read the novel (see Appendix B). The questions asked were established after consultation with other faculty members experienced in teaching the same novel and were related to cultural references contained within the novel.

#### *Personal Growth*

Students were asked to respond to four statements with their opinions on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree) and provide reasons for their answers. These identical statements were administered at two stages: prior to commencing, and on completion of the novel (see Appendix C). These statements were aimed at

targeting students' self-awareness and reflection on various themes and social issues that arise from the novel. The themes were predetermined based on the researcher's experience of the novel and consultations with fellow faculty members. They were introduced by the teacher and discussed in groups by students at various points during the 16-week course. Three issues were focused on: judging someone without knowing them, the influences that shape people's personalities, and the reasons people get married.

## Results

### *Language Learning*

As shown in Table 1, the students' average post-reading vocabulary scores were lower than their pre-reading scores on two occasions. The results for chapters 8-14 and chapters 15-21 indicate a lower score post-reading with a mean differential of 1.11 and 1.1 respectively. Only chapters 22-28 signaled a post-reading average score higher than the pre-reading score by a positive mean differential of 1.35.

**Table 1.**

*Results of Vocabulary Scores Pre-and Post-Reading.  $p < 0.5$*

Statements	Pre-Reading		Post-Reading		t-stat	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Chapters 8-14	8.11	2.245	7	2.384	-2.194	.016*
Chapters 15-21	7.3	2.23	6.2	3.24	-1.799	.057
Chapters 22-28	6.35	3.2	7.7	2.16	2.13	.045*

Note.\* $p < 0.05$

Paired sample t-tests were conducted on each section to determine if statistically significant differences existed between pre- and post-reading test scores. The results indicated a significant difference in the scores pre-reading and post-reading for chapters 8-14  $t(19) = -2.194$ ,  $p = .016$ , and chapters 22-28  $t(19) = 2.13$ ,  $p = .045$ . No significant difference was observed for chapters 15-21  $t(19) = 2.13$ ,  $p = .057$ .

### *Cultural Understanding*

The results for cultural understanding, seen in Table 2, showed a shift in the mean between pre- and post-reading on four statements. For Statement 1, the same mean was observed before and after reading the novel. The changes in the means for the other four statements were not consistent as the data indicated two aspects of culture where knowledge appeared to have increased and two other aspects where it seemed to have decreased.

Cultural knowledge appeared to have been acquired for Statement 2, with a higher mean post-reading ( $M = 10$ ,  $SD = 0$ ) than pre-reading ( $M = 8$ ,  $SD = 0.410$ ). Statement 3 pointed towards the highest improvement with an increase from the pre-reading mean ( $M = 2.5$ ,  $SD = 0.444$ ) to the post-reading mean ( $M = 6.5$ ,  $SD = 0.489$ ) and following a paired sample t-test, demonstrated significantly better understanding post-reading  $t(19) = 2.491$ ,  $p = .017$ . Interestingly, the results from the post-reading of Statement 4 ( $M = 7$ ,  $SD = 0.470$ ) and Statement 5 ( $M = 7.5$ ,  $SD = 0.444$ ) signaled a decrease in the mean values post-reading.

### *Personal Growth*

The results shown in Table 3, pointed to a change in students' opinion pre- and post-reading when responding to each statement.

**Table 2.***Results of Responses to Each Cultural Statement Pre- and Post-Reading,  $p < 0.05$* 

Statements	Correct Answer	Pre-Reading		Post-Reading		t-stat	p
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
1	True	9	0.308	9	0.308	2.105	.1
2	True	8	0.410	10	0	2	.083
3	False	2.5	0.444	6.5	0.489	2.491	.017
4	False	8.5	0.366	7	0.47	-1.151	.267
5	True	9	0.308	7.5	0.444	-1.071	.267

**Table 3.***Results of Students Responses to Personal Growth Statements,  $p < 0.05$* 

Statements	Pre-Reading		Post-Reading		t-stat	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
1	2.5	0.856	3.1	0.963	2.259	.036
2	2.65	0.784	2.15	1.2	-1.876	.076
3	3.75	0.924	3.2	1.396	-1.993	.061
4	2.35	1.029	3.6	0.922	5.64	3E-05

Statement 1 indicated a statistically significant difference between pre-reading ( $M = 2.54$ ,  $SD = 0.856$ ) and post-reading ( $M = 3.12$ ,  $SD = 0.963$ );  $t(19) = 2.259$ ,  $p = .036$ . Students' responses to the open-ended questions providing insights into the reasons for the change of opinion can be seen in Table 4).

The mean for Statement 2 increased between pre-reading ( $M = 2.65$ ,  $SD = 0.784$ ) and post-reading ( $M = 2.15$ ,  $SD = 1.2$ ), but did not indicate a statistically significant difference  $t(19) = -1.876$ ,  $p = .076$ . Again, student responses offered an insight into their thought processes. (See Table 5)

A further decrease in agreement was found with Statement 3 between pre-reading ( $M = 3.75$ ,  $SD = 0.924$ ) and post-reading ( $M = 3.6$ ,  $SD = 1.396$ );  $t(19) = -1.993$ ,  $p = .061$ . (See Table 6)

The response to Statement 4 indicated a clear significant difference between the scores pre-reading ( $M = 2.35$ ,  $SD = 1.029$ ) and post-reading ( $M = 0.922$ ,  $SD = 5.64$ );  $t(19) = 5.64$ ,  $p = 3E-05$  with more students agreeing that people can marry someone without love. (See Table 7)



**Table 4.**

*Student comments on statement "I would be able to fall in love with someone whom I overheard say that they are not physically attracted to me."*

	<i>Before</i>	<i>After</i>
<i>Student 2</i>	<i>(Disagree)</i> No, because I won't love someone who I overheard say that they are not attracted to my looks	<i>(Agree)</i> After reading <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> , I learned that even if the person is not attracted to your looks, they might still love you. For example, Elizabeth and Darcy.
<i>Student 9</i>	<i>(Disagree)</i> I don't think I would be able to love somebody who said that I don't look well. It is a rude thing to talk about how people look.	<i>(Agree)</i> If I get to learn the person who said that is not attracted to my look, my feeling might change. But if I don't, I would dislike the person.
<i>Student 11</i>	<i>(Disagree)</i> No, because that person has made you feel bad.	<i>(Agree)</i> I think I would be able because love is not all about the looks. If the person's personality is good, I think it's OK.

**Table 5.**

*Student comments on statement "I can judge somebody without ever speaking with them"*

	<i>Before</i>	<i>After</i>
<i>Student 1</i>	<i>(Undecided)</i> If I only hear about them from one person, I wouldn't. If I heard about them from many people, I think I would be able to believe it.	<i>(Strongly disagree)</i> Just because someone has nice looks or the opposite doesn't mean that they act that way. From <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> Elizabeth thought Mr. Wickham has nice looks but he was actually a man with a bad personality.
<i>Student 2</i>	<i>(Agree)</i> Yes, if someone explains me about personality of them.	<i>(Strongly disagree)</i> I can't understand someone's personality if not my family because I don't have in touch that much.
<i>Student 6</i>	<i>(Undecided)</i> If you heard about the personality of someone, you will understand that person's character, but you cannot know everything.	<i>(Strongly disagree)</i> You cannot know someone's personality without meeting that person.

**Table 6.**

*Student comments on statement "We acquire our personality from our family"*

	<i>Before</i>	<i>After</i>
<i>Student 5</i>	<i>(Disagree)</i> You will not have the exact same personality as your family but you will have some similar parts so I think our family influences our personality a bit.	<i>(Agree)</i> Just like some of the sisters from the Bennet family, we are influenced strongly by our family.

**Table 7.**

*Student comments on statement "People can marry someone even if they do not love them."*

	<i>Before</i>	<i>After</i>
<i>Student 17</i>	<i>(Strongly disagree)</i> I think people can't marry someone if they know they don't love them. I can't marry a person whom I don't love because marriage without love wouldn't make you happy.	<i>(Agree)</i> Some people can marry someone for their money and social status even if they don't love each other.

## Discussion

*Hypothesis 1: Students' receptive knowledge of vocabulary improves after autonomous reading of the novel.*

In general, the results of this study could not definitively confirm whether receptive knowledge of vocabulary improves after autonomous reading of a novel. Even though a significant difference was observed in students' receptive knowledge of vocabulary pre- and post-reading for chapters 8-14 and chapters 22-28, the mean score decreased post-reading for chapters 8-14. The cause of this observed difference is unknown, but could be attributed to random chance. Despite not adjusting the pedagogical approach, chapters 22-28 showed improvement in vocabulary acquisition post-reading. What is noteworthy is that the post-reading quiz for chapters 22-28 was conducted one week prior to students taking their end of term grade exams, which they were aware included a vocabulary section. Hence, motivation to study for the final exams could have been a contributing factor to the improvement in post-reading scores for that section. Despite this increase, the overall inconsistency of the study's results support Nation's (2013a) claim that poorly focused vocabulary learning is insufficient for developing vocabulary and reinforces the argument that vocabulary learning should be supported by deliberate teaching and scaffolding (see Day, Omura & Hiramatsu, 1991; Dupuy & Krashen, 1993). Nation (2013b) and Schmitt (2008) also recommend a pedagogical strategy that scaffolds students' learning, such as highlighting targeted vocabulary and preparing tasks to be completed post-reading. Research findings by Sonbul and Schmitt (2010) further support the requirement for an integrated process of vocabulary learning through reading and explicit instruction. An additional factor impeding vocabulary learning in this study is possibly the lack of

repetition of the lexical items within the text. As all the vocabulary in this study was identified by the previous year's students, there was no consideration given to word repetition. This limited contact with a lexical item is concerning as Pellicer-Sánchez and Schmitt (2010) found that even though one exposure can lead to learning of a word form and recognition, learning accelerated with multiple exposures. To conclude, learners may need to be given opportunities through intentional activities such as the creation and administration of structured vocabulary exercises to consolidate vocabulary, especially those words that appear less often.

*Hypothesis 2: Student knowledge of a foreign culture improves after autonomous reading of the novel.*

The results for Hypothesis 2 are inconclusive but suggest that knowledge of more obvious cultural references can be improved, but more subtle references go unnoticed. Only Statement 3 indicated a significant difference in improvement pre- and post-reading. Although these differences could be statistical noise due to the small sample size, it is interesting to note that Statement 3 is connected to an inheritance theme that is central to the narrative and is revisited on many occasions throughout *Pride and Prejudice*. By contrast, the other culture related statements appear less frequently and, as a result, may have passed undetected by the students. Subsequently, teachers, especially those pursuing a pedagogical goal that is closely aligned with Carter and Long's (1991) description to introduce distinct cultural information, should consider highlighting more concealed references and provide adequate summaries. An alternative approach is for teachers to expand their interpretation of literature's function in transmitting cultural knowledge to

incorporating the goals of developing students' self-awareness and communication skills. Karsh (1993) believes that cultures contained within literature provide openings for learners to create meaning for themselves as they critically reflect on their own and the targeted culture. For example, rather than provide an extended analysis on the role of British women around the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the teacher could direct students to examples from within the narrative and then have them compare the roles of women in Britain and Japan at that time. In this situation, the teacher functions as a facilitator by highlighting the culture, allowing students to assimilate it and then negotiate the differences and similarities between that and their own. As a consequence, cultural references contained within literature evolve from being objects of study to acting as catalysts for creating dynamic opportunities for students to develop self-awareness and communicative proficiency.

*Hypothesis 3: Student personal growth is activated after autonomous reading of the novel.*

The data shows a shift and hence activation in students' self-awareness and opinions prior to and after reading the novel. In particular, more students appear to have become increasingly cognizant of the complexities underpinning different situations through their engagement with the narrative. Student feedback also suggests a greater maturity on completion of the novel in relation to different themes. However, it is important to remember that even though the teacher refrained from providing personal views on issues contained within these statements, they were predetermined prior to reading the novel and discussed at length by students at various points over the course of the sixteen-week period. Consequently, if sufficient time and opportunities are provided that allow students to independently negotiate themes within a novel with each other, educators can perform an ancillary role in promoting personal growth in an advanced EFL classroom. It is not clear from the study if metacognitive processes such as an increase in self-awareness and reflection on opinions would be observed in the absence of open discussion and dedicated class time.

### Conclusion

As teacher interest in literature in an EFL classroom grows, so does the need to assess its role within the classroom. The present research only touched the periphery of the benefits of literature in an advanced

proficiency EFL classroom and the findings are certainly not definitive. However, the results tentatively support findings from previous studies that in parallel with autonomous reading, educators should consider deliberate teaching and scaffolding of vocabulary. Similarly, depending on the pedagogical objective when introducing culture, summaries may be needed if the goal is solely to chronicle it. By contrast, aspects of a novel that act as a catalyst for cognitive engagement which could include culture can be activated with minimal teacher involvement through student engagement with the contents of the novel and each other.

It is important to acknowledge this study has three major limitations. First, all of the reading was assigned outside of class, thus making it difficult to establish students' true engagement with the contents of the novel. Future research should consider dedicated in-class reading time. Second, the sample size is small, and further studies should incorporate a larger number of students. Finally, even though most students indicated via an exit survey that they enjoyed the novel, the book was not the participants' own choice. Despite these limitations, the present study offered an insight into the benefits or otherwise of literature in an advanced EFL class and informed the researcher at least, of the need for considerations when introducing a novel as a pedagogical resource in a language classroom.

### Author Biography

*Niall Walsh* is a full-time lecturer at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies and has been living and teaching in central Japan since 2003. His primary research interests include literature in language teaching, materials development and written corrective feedback.

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**Appendix A: Vocabulary quizzes***Pre-reading 8-14*

Word	Synonym
1. shame	A. ask questions
2. inquire	B. worry
3. pale	C. non-attendance
4. blame	D. affect
5. swell	E. dirty
6. anxiety	F. humiliation
7. influence	G. become bigger
8. absence	H. hold someone responsible for something
9. muddy	I. be against
10. opposed	J. light colo(u)red

*Post-reading 8-14*

Word	Synonym
1. plain	A. speak briefly about something
2. insincere	B. to like someone or something
3. mention	C. military person, in the army
4. sorrow	D. cut in on, stop someone talking
5. fond	E. to be angry with someone
6. colonel	F. to feel happy, have fun
7. interrupt	G. simple, not beautiful
8. scold	H. ask someone to do something
9. amusement	I. to feel sadness
10. proposal	J. not real

*Pre-reading chapters 15-21*

Word	Synonym
1. stretch	A. dislike
2. eager	B. to be fair
3. confusion	C. keep away, stay away
4. cross	D. high respect
5. swallow	E. nice
6. justice	F. excited to do something
7. pleasant	G. to pass something to your stomach
8. honour	H. make longer
9. avoid	I. to not understand
10. charge	J. accuse

*Post-reading 15-21*

Word	Synonym
1. pardon	A. unfair
2. severe	B. not knowing something
3. suspicious	C. embarrassed
4. unjust	D. hard
5. ashamed	E. to trick
6. urge	F. to forgive someone
7. upset	G. injury, have pain
8. wound	H. to encourage
9. deceive	I. not sure, uncertain, to guess
10. unconscious	J. disappointed or worried

*Pre-reading 22-28*

Word	Synonym
1. stem	A. make someone do something
2. scorn	B. to challenge
3. quarrel	C. reject/refuse
4. dare	D. wish for
5. desirous	E. be rude to/offend
6. heir	F. argue
7. debt	G. to come from something
8. persuade	H. next owner
9. insulting	I. minimum
10. least	J. have to give money back to someone

*Post-reading 22-28*

Word	Synonym
1. sensible	A. move away
2. dull	B. uncomfortable
3. awkward	C. not real
4. intend	D. dark
5. conscience	E. well mannered
6. grateful	F. a person's sense of what's right
7. pretend	G. peaceful
8. calmness	H. to give thanks
9. polite	I. responsible
10. part	J. plan

### Appendix B: Cultural knowledge statements

Please circle whether each of the following statements regarding the culture of the time is true or false.

Statements	True	False
1. Social status was very important around the end of the 18 <sup>th</sup> century.		
2. Parents wanted their daughters to marry a wealthy person.		
3. Upon their parents' death, all the wealth and property of the family passed to the eldest child.		
4. Every child had the power to freely choose who they could marry.		
5. It was not unusual for relations to marry each other.		

### Appendix C: Personal growth statements

With 1 being *strongly disagree* and 5 being *strongly agree*, please rank your opinion on the following four statements. Please provide reasons for your opinion.

Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1. I would be able to fall in love with someone whom I overheard say that they are not physically attracted to me.					
Explain:					
2. I can judge somebody without ever speaking with them.					
Explain:					
3. We acquire our personality from our family.					
Explain:					
4. People can marry someone even if they do not love them.					
Explain:					

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*Literature in practice***Creating Opportunities for Authentic Communicative Exchange:****Exploring Haiku, Tanka, and Senryu in English**

Meredith Stephens

*Tokushima University***Abstract**

Poetry can be an ideal way to introduce Communicative English to EFL students. As Kamata (2016) advised, “Literary texts provide meaningful contexts, involve a profound range of vocabulary, encourage cultural awareness and critical thinking, and serve as a stimulus for composition” (p. 5). A class of 23 university students majoring in English chose Japanese-language poetic forms of haiku, tanka and senryu as a basis for completing both written assignments and oral presentations. Some students elected to submit their own compositions of the final poetic form, senryu, in Japanese and English. The opportunity for students to select poems from their own literary tradition and present them to the teacher provided opportunities for authentic communicative exchange.

**Key words:** student reflections on Japanese poetry,  
student poetry composition, cross-cultural communicative exchange

**The Teaching Context**

Twenty-three English language majors in an elective course in the International Liberal Arts department at a national university in Japan were asked to choose Japanese poems, submit written assignments, and provide oral presentations about them in English. The assignments in the semester-long course were divided into three poetic genres: haiku, tanka, and senryu. The purpose of choosing Japanese rather than English-language poetry was to build upon prior knowledge (Hattie & Yates, 2014), by reflecting in English upon familiar Japanese-language poetic forms. An example of building upon prior knowledge is provided by Iida (2017), who recommended that Japanese learners of English learn to write in the genre of haiku because of its cultural familiarity. In the current study, reflecting on haiku was supplemented by reflecting on both tanka and senryu.

This course had previously been taught for several years in face-to-face mode. The COVID-19 pandemic began when I was visiting my country of Australia in February 2020. I suddenly became unable to return to Japan and had to learn how to conduct classes using Zoom. The university approved the use of distance

learning and purchased a Zoom subscription for teachers who wished to use it. Because I had previously taught this course, and because my home city of Adelaide, Australia has only a thirty-minute time difference with Japan in the spring semester, the transition to distance learning caused minimal disruption. For a more detailed discussion of how I implemented distance learning, see Stephens (2020a).

**Japanese Poetic Forms of Haiku, Tanka and Senryu**

The students were familiar with haiku, tanka and senryu from their pre-university education. Japanese children are familiar with both reading and composing haiku. Even primary school children in Year One may be required to regularly compose haiku (Stephens, 2020b).

Haiku consist of three lines of five, seven and five syllables. Tanka consist of five lines of five, seven, five, seven, and seven syllables. Senryu have the same five-seven-five syllabic structure as haiku but differ in content. Unlike haiku, senryu do not begin with a seasonal reference, and the content is typically satirical or ironic. The name senryu derives from the poet Karai Senryū (1718–90), whose humorous poems were first published in 1765 (Schreiber, 2018). There are various



genres of senryu, such as *salaryman* senryu, which depict the trials of corporate life. An unlikely topic consists of one proposed by a company producing socks (Okamoto Socks), which holds a contest for patrons to contribute senryu lamenting the anxieties of having smelly feet (*ashikusa* senryu) (Okamoto Group, n.d.).

### Assignments

There were three types of assignments over the course of the semester, and students were free to choose any poem within the set genre. The first was a written assignment of 200 words, requiring the students firstly to summarize the poem (100 words), and provide a personal response to it (100 words). Students submitted five written assignments over the semester. They found the poems from a variety of sources. Some chose poems that they had studied in pre-university education. Others found poems from library books, and others through internet searches. The second assignments were two oral presentations consisting of the same content as two of the written assignments. After each oral presentation students were divided into pairs for discussion using the breakout room function on Zoom, after which they returned to the group and posed questions to the presenter in English.

The final assignment was to compose a senryu in Japanese and English, and to provide an accompanying illustration, on the themes of life during COVID, human relationships, or life as a student. This assignment was for extra credit. Although Japanese-language compositions of senryu conformed to the five-seven-five syllabic structure, English translations were not required to conform to this structure. Five-seven-five is a familiar syllabic structure in the Japanese language, and therefore many students can compose senryu with ease. The purpose of the English translation was to convey the message rather than conform to a prescribed number of syllables.

### Interpretation of Poems

*Why use Poetry in the Communicative English class?*

One of the reasons that poetry is a suitable subject for Communicative English classes is that it permits students to interpret the text themselves. According to Joritz-Nakagawa (2012),

[B]ecause various interpretations of a poem are always possible, poems can be good stimuli for pair and group discussions as working out what

poems may mean or what varying reactions students have to them is a chance for meaningful classroom communication (p. 17).

Similarly to Joritz-Nakagawa, Iida (2017) stressed the importance of student voice in the interpretation of poetry:

Of particular importance is for the instructor to guide students to have their own interpretation of the poem and share it with their classmates. In this way, they can understand the concept of multiple interpretations in that each reader has his or her own responses to the poem. This approach enables students to interpret the poem in a descriptive, non-judgmental way (p. 266).

One of the goals of the class was to stimulate discussion. Discussion, in turn, fosters the skills of listening carefully to other students' presentations, thinking deeply about the intention of the poet, and interpreting the poem in terms of their own life experience. Both Joritz-Nakagawa (2012) and Iida (2017) above highlighted this process of having students interpret poetry. In order to interpret a poem, students need firstly to understand the poet's intent, and then make a connection with their lived experience. Accordingly, the process not only fosters English language communicative skills, but also the processes of reflection and honing their thoughts.

### *Examples of Students' Interpretation of Poetry*

One student presented his favorite tanka, written by poet Fumiko Nakajo (1922–1954). He identified the complexity of the coexistence of beauty and sadness when looking at fireworks. The beauty of the fireworks is fleeting, because they appear and then immediately disappear. I was struck by the student's fresh insight and appreciated how teachers can also learn from students. The opportunity for the students to select their own poem opened up genuine communicative possibilities that would not have arisen had I provided the text myself.

An excerpt of the student's assignment appears below:

Today, I would like to introduce Tanka written about fireworks. 「音高く 夜空に花火 うち開き われは隈なく 奪われている」. It means that the author was deprived of her mind by beauty of fireworks. This Tanka

written by Fumiko Nakajo. She was born in Hokkaido. She got married and has children. But she would often fight with her husband. To make matters worse, her husband prevented her from writing Tanka. Finally, she decided to live separate from husband. So, there are many Tanka written about her complains to husband.

I think this Tanka is express not only beauty but also her sadness. When I saw this Tanka for the first time, I thought this Haiku express only beauty. However, I thought it includes her sad feeling when I learned about her life. For now, I will explain reason why I chose this Tanka. I like fireworks and this Tanka remind me of fireworks display held in my hometown every July (called “Minato Matsuri). That’s why I chose this Tanka as a subject of homework. Fireworks always entertain visitors. However, it also gave them sadness because it is disappear immediately. This sadness is one of the reason that people fascinated by it. As the author said, every people deprived of their mind by fireworks which has a moment of shine. (Kōsei Itō)

Another student chose a prize-winning senryu from an annual Youth Senryu Contest held at Shikoku University (Kōbo Online, n.d.). This senryu featured three homophones for the word *shin-yū*, each represented by a separate character and therefore possessing separate meanings, which the student translated as ‘new friend, close friend and best friend’. This reflects the pattern of establishing new friendships at university. Once students reach university, they meet other students from both distant parts of the prefecture, and from other prefectures. Students make new friends, and their shared experiences at university may foster increasingly closer friendships.

新友が 親友になり 心友に  
(shin-yū ga shinyū ni nari shinyū ni)

A new friend becomes a close friend,  
and the close friend becomes the best

(Poet: Akari Nakano. Natsu Takan, 2020)  
(Acknowledgement to Mayu Okamoto)

## Composition of Poems

### *Rationale for Students to Compose Poetry*

According to Bruner, (1996) learning “is best when it is participatory, proactive, communal, collaborative, and given over to constructing meanings rather than receiving them” (p. 84). The composition of *senryu* in this class, while not conforming to all of Bruner’s description, was at least participatory, proactive, and served to construct meaning. In regard to language learning in particular, Kamata (2016) argued that “creative writing exercises help to give students a sense of responsibility for their own learning” (p. 5).

### *Students’ Poetry*

The following poems were selected, and the authors of these poems gave permission for their compositions to be shared and for their names to appear. The *senryu* below demonstrates student investment in their language learning because of the intrinsically personal nature of their compositions. The first student, Mayu, wrote two senryu about how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted her life (See Figure 1). The first one explained how confinement to her home made her uneasy when interacting with people other than family members in the workplace. The second expressed how she missed face-to-face conversations with her friends about trivial matters that she had formerly taken for granted.

I composed two Senryu about recent life.

One is 「久々に 人と喋ると 空回り」  
[(Hisabisa ni hito to shaberu to karamawari)]. I translate it into English, “When I talk with someone, I spin my wheels because I haven’t talked with anyone for a long time.” I didn’t go to university during the first semester, so I went out only for my part-time job. When I was talked to by my boss or senior in the cram school where I work, I felt my heart beating because I didn’t often talk with people other than my family.

The other is 「なんでもない 友との会話が 恋しいな」 [(nan demo nai tomo to no kaiwa ga koishī na)]. I translate it into English, “I miss trivial conversation with my friends.”

When I went to university and talked with my friends every day, I didn’t notice it was important and precious. I send messages on [messaging app] LINE with them now, but I

would like to talk about meaningless things such as lunch, sweets, and studying face to face.

### Figure 1

*Two illustrated Senryu. Text and pictures by Mayu Okumoto*



The following senryu similarly discussed isolation during the pandemic, explaining the student's renewed appreciation of friendship.

自粛中 気づかされたよ 友のよさ  
(jishuku-chū kizukasareta yo tomo no yosa)

While staying home  
Being aware of  
The wonderfulness of friends

(Poet: Misaki Okita)

The next senryu explained how the social isolation during the pandemic leads to sisters appreciating the contact they have with each other, enabling them to reinterpret even their quarrels favourably.

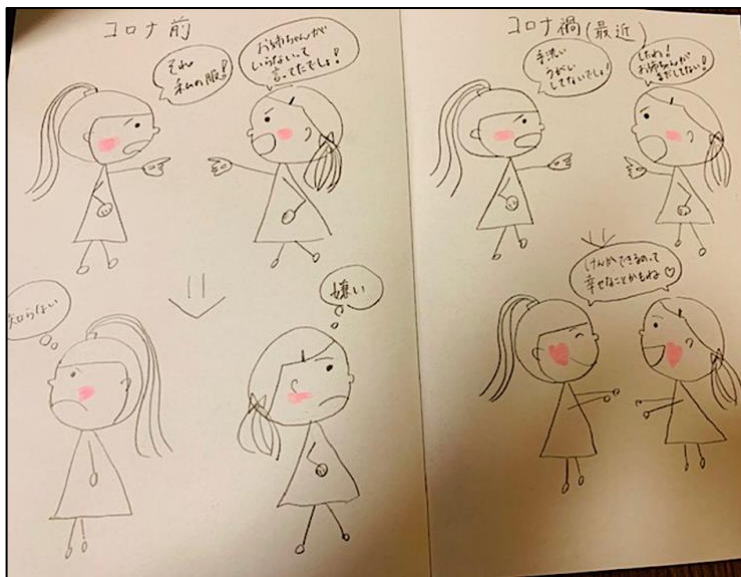
コロナ禍は 姉妹喧嘩も 幸となる  
(korona-ka wa shimai kenka mo kō to naru)

In COVID-19 related confusion,  
even quarrels between sisters  
make me happy!

(Poet: Riko Okada)

## Figure 2

Illustration of the meaning of a senryu. Text and pictures by Riko Okada



### Translation

Before Corona:

**Big Sister:** You're wearing my clothes!

**Little Sister:** Didn't you say you didn't need them?

**Big Sister** (*thought bubble*): I didn't know that.

**Little Sister** (*thought bubble*): I hate her.

After Corona:

**Big Sister:** You haven't washed your hands or gargled!

**Little Sister:** I did, but you haven't.

**Both sisters** (*thought bubble*): We can have a quarrel, so maybe that's a good thing.

The next senryu expressed the students' dissatisfaction at having overeaten when being confined to the home during the pandemic:

コロナ下で 自宅待機で 体重増加  
(korona-ka de jitaku taiki de taijū zōka)

Under the situation of COVID,  
I stay home.  
So, I gain weight.

(Poet: Mai Tomita)

### Concluding Remarks

Reflecting on and discussing Japanese poetry in English enables students to move from the known to the unknown. This provides a genuine communicative gap as they explain their own literary tradition to a teacher who may not be from that literary tradition, and as they present their various interpretations of the poems to their classmates. Discussing and composing poetry provides an opportunity for personalization; the students can create poetry with reference to their own lives, which facilitates language learning. Most importantly, reflecting on and composing poetry is enjoyable, which in turn improves student engagement.

### Author biography

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*Literature in practice***Crossing Borders: Going from Poetry to News before Coming Back**

Mary Hillis

*Ritsumeikan University***Abstract**

Japanese literature in English translation can be an engaging tool for language learning. This article describes the implementation of a lesson plan for Osaki Sayaka's *Aboo* (2019), a poem about a tortoise who escapes from the zoo, in a poetry course for university students. It includes activities to support students as they read, discuss, and analyze texts before writing their own poems. In the reading portion of the lesson, students focus on understanding context clues, and in the discussion section, students make connections between the poem and their previous experiences. In addition to reading the poem, students read a related news article and analyze both texts for content and form. Finally, students compose original poems based on recent news stories. Using Japanese literature in English translation is an effective way to engage students while working toward course goals.

**Key words:** Japanese literature, poetry, writing, creativity, pedagogy, graphic organizers

Japanese literature in English translation can be used as part of language or content classes. By reading literature in translation, students can develop an awareness that “their local culture exists far beyond their local context” (Thomas, 2014). Furthermore, these literary texts may be culturally familiar to the students. *Aboo*, a poem written in Japanese by Osaki Sayaka and translated into English by Jeffrey Angles (2019), was studied as part of a poetry course at a Japanese university. Within this particular class, some students were amazed to discover that contemporary Japanese poetry is translated into other languages and read by people around the world. This poem is about a tortoise named Aboo who escapes from the zoo and is based on a true story from Okayama prefecture in 2017, so students’ possible recollection of this event could help them interpret the poem. This article describes my experience implementing the lesson plan “The body escaping confinement” (Asymptote for Educators, 2019). As part of this lesson, students read and analyzed not only the poem *Aboo* but also a newspaper article about a tortoise escaping from the zoo. To complete text analysis, students used a graphic organizer, noting the similarities and differences

between the two texts, and then crafted their own poems based on recent human-interest news stories.

**Background**

Students enrolled in this poetry course are second-year students in a policy studies department who have completed foundational reading, speaking, listening, presentation, and writing courses. These courses are part of a coordinated English curriculum and are designed to develop students’ language and intercultural communication skills, as well as to prepare them to study academic subjects in English. As a bridge between English skills courses and academic courses in English, second-year students take a special preparatory course offered by English language teachers: topics have included poetry, art history, bilingualism, behavioral economics, and film studies. Regardless of the course topic, the goals are to study a topic in English while building on previously learned English skills, participating in small-group discussions, and developing research skills. Students are required to take one of these courses, but they are able to choose their preferred topic from the list of courses offered that semester. In

principle, this means that students enrolled in the poetry course have some level of interest in literature. Many students remarked in an introductory survey to the course that although they had experience reading poems in Japanese, they did not have much experience reading them in English. The class met once per week for 90 minutes and had an average class size of 25 students. The lesson described in this article was conducted during a makeup class near the end of the semester.

When reading Japanese literature, Japanese students may become more absorbed in reading, analyzing, and discussing the texts. Tanaka (2015) found that when students can use their background knowledge, "... students gain confidence to voice their opinion and lead the conversation." This idea of increased confidence is also stated by Teranishi and Nasu (2016): "The theme or content should be familiar enough for students to make inferences concerning their contextual aspects; this ensures that their reading and analysis are meaningful and enjoyable, and it also boosts confidence."

Japanese poems in English translation have been incorporated into a variety of university-level language classes in Japan. Tanaka (2015) used English translations of tanka poems by Yosano Akiko, a Japanese poet who lived from 1878-1942. During class time, students led discussions about the poems and their translations. Teranishi & Nasu (2016) used English translations of haiku poems in the classroom. The students read the poems and then used them as models for writing their own haiku or other types of poetry with metaphors. Short stories in translation can be utilized as well; for example, Hourdequin (2015) read a short story by Murakami Haruki with his students, and the majority said that they wanted to read the English text before reading the Japanese translation.

These Japanese literary texts in English translation provided a different experience for students from literature originally written in English because students may be familiar with the cultural aspects of Japanese literature, and the original text could be used for linguistic support, if needed.

### Reading: Understanding contextual clues

Students' prior knowledge is an important consideration, and there are a variety of activities that can be used to activate previous experience with a topic (Brown, 2001; Clanfield & Duncan, 2004; Zull, 2002). Because the setting of the poem *Aboo* is a zoo, the pre-reading portion of the lesson focused on two questions: What

comes to mind when you hear the word "zoo"? and What do you think about zoos? By discussing these questions, students' schemata on these topics opened, thereby fostering accessibility and encouraging curiosity about the contents of the poem.

The purpose of the next stage in the lesson was to read and understand the poem. In class, students listened to the teacher read the poem aloud and then they read the poem aloud with a partner, alternating stanzas. Students read the poem again silently, and they checked the meaning of unknown vocabulary by asking questions or using a dictionary. Examples of commonly unknown words included the following low frequency words: horseflies, northern hemisphere, spangle butterfly, tenaciousness, and righteousness. When defining the term "spangle butterfly", it was more effective to show a picture of the butterfly or provide the Japanese translation (*agehacho*) than referring to a definition in English. "Northern hemisphere" is a particularly important word for understanding the subject of the poem because it alludes to the shape of the tortoise's shell.

In fact, the word "tortoise" is not written in the poem, so to deepen understanding, students reread and discussed ideas with classmates, before guessing to whom "you" refers in this poem. The teacher can remind students of the warm-up questions which provide a hint that the poem is about a zoo animal. Although giving a hint limits the range of possible answers (Mason and Giovanelli, 2017), students were still engaged in the process of discovering the identity of the animal. To scaffold the process of reading between the lines, the students reread one stanza at a time and the teacher wrote clues on the board for further support (see Table 1). For example, the lines "... horseflies landed / On the northern hemisphere that is your back" suggest the animal's shape. Similarly, these lines provide further information about its form: "Your thick legs marched through shadows cast / By the highest branches of the cherry trees / As you munched upon the grass that tickles your throat". Finally, lines from the last stanza show readers the animal's movement, "The slowness of your pace might have been distressing". After understanding the meaning of these clues, students usually infer that the poem is about a turtle or tortoise. Finally, students referred to the author note accompanying the poem which states that Aboo is the name of a tortoise who escaped from a zoo in Okayama Prefecture in the summer of 2017.

**Table 1***Understanding contextual clues in the poem*

Stanza	Quotation	Key Question
2	"... horseflies landed / On the northern hemisphere that is your back"	What shape is the animal?
6	"Your thick legs marched through shadows cast / ... / As you munched upon the grass that tickles your throat"	Is the animal tall or short? What does the animal eat?
8	"The slowness of your pace might have been distressing"	Is the animal fast or slow?

**Discussion: Making connections**

After reading the poem, open-ended discussion questions were asked to encourage students to explore ideas and emotions related to the poem. The discussion fostered meaningful connections as students related their experiences with those presented in the text. The following questions guided the discussion:

- What came to mind when reading this poem? What are your favorite lines?
- Does this poem relate to anything you discussed about zoos at the beginning of class? Does it relate to anything you have previously studied?
- Does this poem remind you of any other stories you have read or heard?
- What feelings or emotions do you think this poem evokes? What themes do you think this poem addresses?

In response to the first question, some students relayed their experiences seeing animals at the zoo or hearing about this incident when they were high school students. One student replied that this poem reminded him of the chimes ringing from public speakers at around 5:00 p.m. to tell children to go back home for the night. If he did not go home, then his parents came

to the local park to retrieve him and take him back home. The student related this experience to the part of the poem when the father and son find Aboo in a nearby forest and then return him to the zoo. It is as if the tortoise's play time is over. In this way, students explored personal connections to the poem and actively participated in the discussion with their peers.

Subsequent discussion questions revisited the warm-up discussion and reviewed previously learned course material. Asking students to compare their ideas about zoos from the warm-up discussion with the ideas about zoos expressed in the poem was the starting point. Furthermore, students revisited material learned in previous lessons; in this case, they had already studied literary devices, so they recognized that the poem is written free verse, has stanzas of varying lengths, and repetition of the line "Came from outside before going back." The writer also ascribes thoughts and feelings to the tortoise in the text, and the students were able to recognize it from the following lines: "But deep in your jawbone you knew" and "In your docile belief that the ground that goes on endlessly." By revisiting previous material, students consciously made connections between old and new information.

To draw attention to the connection between texts, students were asked if they could relate anything in this poem with another poem, story, or text that they are



familiar with in English, Japanese, or another language. Key questions were as follows: Do you know any other texts about tortoises, zoos, or escaped animals? Students might connect the poem to other folk tales with turtle characters, such as *The Tortoise and the Hare* or *Urashima Taro* (a Japanese folk tale about a fisherman who rescues a turtle and is rewarded by the princess for his actions). Students might also notice references to nature, such as cherry trees, and give examples of other texts that include cherry trees.

The final discussion question prompted students to talk about what themes they think the poem addresses. The final lines of the poem are “The slowness of your steps might have been distressing / But never did you doubt the righteousness of a single step.” Students guessed that these lines communicate the poem’s theme, referred to as “we can do anything” by one student. Others paraphrased the poem’s theme as “making small steps forward” or “believing in ourselves” which students thought were lessons that they could take away from the poem.

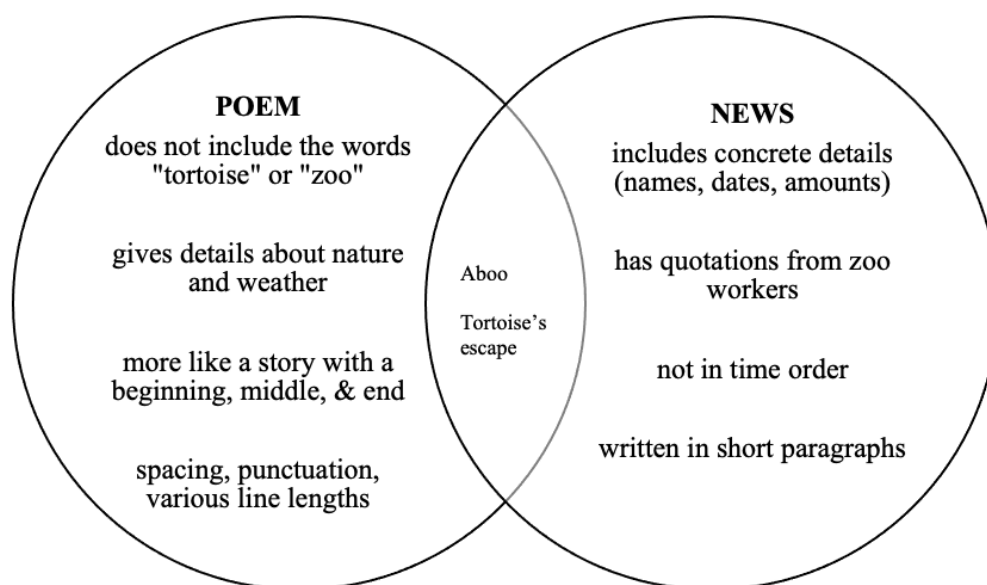
If it is relevant to the aims of the course, teachers could have students read the poem in Japanese and do further extension activities related to literary translation.

### Analysis: Completing a graphic organizer

After reading the poem, students read a newspaper article from *The Japan Times*, “Giant tortoise on the run no more” (Kikuchi, 2017). This newspaper article is about the incident of a tortoise escaping from the zoo, which is referred to in the author’s note as the inspiration for the poem. In the text analysis activity, students focused on rereading both texts and investigating the structure and content in order to become more familiar with their respective conventions (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2004). Students were given the focus question, “What similarities and differences between the poem and the news article can you find?” In order to record their answers, students completed a Venn Diagram with two overlapping circles on which they wrote notes. The characteristics of the poem were noted on the left circle, and the characteristics of the article in the right circle, with the shared characteristics written in the middle where the two circles overlap (Figure 1). Graphic organizers or concept maps, such as Venn diagrams, are one effective learning strategy for connecting various sources of information, as outlined by Lang (2016). In this way, students visualized ideas, and they made connections not only between the two texts but also between previous knowledge and newly learned information.

**Figure 1**

*Venn Diagram (student exercise)*



Students identified differences between the two texts in both content and form. One dissimilar point between the two is that the word “tortoise” is not written in the poem, so readers have to infer the subject through careful reading. In addition, the poem includes imagery, such as “... shadows cast / By the highest branches of the cherry trees”. On the other hand, the news article by Kikuchi (2017) includes concrete details directly mentioning the tortoise (e.g., “female Aldabra giant tortoise named Aboo”), the names of people (e.g., “zoo worker Yoshimi Yamane”), and specific dates (e.g., “surveillance camera footage showed her [Aboo] leaving the area on Aug. 1”). However, unlike the poem, the journalistic account of events does not include any description of the natural environment.

Students also found differences related to the format and organization in the two pieces. In the poem, the line “You read the words *follow me*” includes the words “*follow me*” in italics to signify that someone communicated this idea. In contrast, in the news article, words spoken by people are inside quotation marks as can be seen in the following sentence from the article: “I feel relieved. From now on, we’ll make sure to take perfect care of our animals,” said zoo worker Yoshimi Yamane ...” (Kikuchi, 2017). Furthermore, the poem’s lines sometimes have more than one space between words and the lines are various lengths, while the newspaper article is written in prose and uses short paragraphs. As for organization, the events are arranged chronologically from beginning to end in the poem; however, events in the news article are not arranged linearly.

### **Writing: Creating poems about the news**

Reading and writing poetry in tandem encourages students to read and write with greater purpose and enthusiasm. Koch (1990) intertwined the two through the concept of “poetry ideas,” an approach in which students write poems that are similar in some way to the poems that they have read in class. In this case, after having read both the poem and the news article, students were invited to create poems about current events. In order to select a topic for their poems, students used research skills learned in a previous English course: they brainstormed ideas, identified key search terms, and evaluated online search results before choosing a news article to read. Students had autonomy to select a topic of their choice for this assignment. Because the poem *Aboo* is based on a human-interest story, many students selected topics from the 2019 news cycle, such as the

Japanese horse, Master Fencer, in the Kentucky Derby, the Olympic ticket lottery, or the beginning of the Reiwa Era. Some students chose to focus on other types of news stories, such as recent natural disasters.

After selecting and reading their chosen news article, students highlighted key points before listing their thoughts and feelings and imagining details in preparation for writing their poems. Because students had already made connections with the poem *Aboo* based in Japanese culture and language, they exhibited greater confidence and willingness to write about a local news event in English. The poems included a variety of literary devices and conveyed familiar news events in fresh and interesting ways. These poems were written as part of a homework assignment to be shared in a subsequent lesson, if time permitted.

### **Conclusion**

This lesson offered several benefits for Japanese university students. Because students read a poem that was translated from Japanese to English, and the cultural context was familiar, they were able to use background knowledge to help them understand contextual clues and interpret the poem. Students read a newspaper article about the Okayama Zoo incident and also another article of their choosing which gave them the opportunity to analyze how information is conveyed differently across genres. By writing original poems, students integrated what they learned about poetry and news to express information in new and creative ways. All of these activities corresponded with the course goals to develop language, discussion, and research skills. By using contemporary Japanese literature in English translation, reading and writing poems became more enjoyable activities because they were more closely related to the students’ lives. Students became increasingly engaged in the learning process because they had multiple opportunities throughout the lesson to think creatively and express ideas in new ways.

### **Author Biography**

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*Literature in practice***Creative Writing in Extensive Reading Instruction**

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Extensive reading (ER) has been gaining popularity as a method of instruction due to the advantages it confers in language acquisition. To capitalize on the benefits of ER, it has been suggested that students need to be involved in activities that relate to and engage them more with the texts that are being read (Day and Bamford, 1998; Green, 2005). This article will discuss the creation of an elective ER course with a creative writing component for second year Japanese university students in a rigorous English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program. The aim of the course is to recycle and build on the skills taught in the core EAP program through the introduction of creative writing as a tool for engaging students with extensive reading (ER). The basic premise for the development of the syllabus will be discussed, as well as the challenges and successes faced in implementation in regular versus online classes. Future directions for course development and possible avenues of research on the connection between ER and creative writing will be introduced.

**Key words:** extensive reading (ER), creative writing, materials development, emergency remote teaching (ERT)

Extensive reading (ER) has been defined as reading for pleasure, or in the case of L2 learners, reading a lot of books especially created for the purpose (graded readers) that are at or slightly below their level. This reading style is associated with a significant increase in reading fluency (Stoller, 2015). ER has recently gained more popularity in higher education in Asia and has started to be implemented in various EAP programs at universities throughout Japan. There is ample evidence in the academic literature of the various benefits of ER, such as improvement in vocabulary acquisition, writing, grammar, test performance on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), as well as an overall improvement in general L2 competency and reading proficiency (Beglar, 2012; Day & Bamford, 1998; Krashen, 2004). Krashen (2004) even claims that ER

may be superior to the usual practice of classroom taught reading skills through Intensive Reading (IR). Unlike ER, the practice of IR exposes students to more challenging texts and asks them to dissect the text at the paragraph, sentence, and word level. In Japan, IR is also known as the grammar translation method because the students are taught to approach reading in L2 as a translation exercise: the students analyze the texts from a grammar standpoint before translating into Japanese. Students practicing ER have been shown to have higher gains in reading speeds and comprehension compared to those being taught with the IR method (Suk, 2014). ER has also been shown as having a significant positive effect on motivation for university students who have failed and had to retake an English course (Mason & Krashen, 1997). Japanese university students who read

on average over 70,000 words over the course of a 15-week semester were shown to engage less in sentence level translation, a common obstacle in carrying out ER for Japanese students due to the traditional grammar translation method through which they were taught reading in junior and senior high school (Sakurai, 2015).

To fully reap the benefits of ER, it should be combined with other classroom practices for students to perceive the value of this style of reading (Day et al., 2015; Green, 2005). Stoller and Holiday (2005) suggest that ER should have follow up activities that are designed to be enjoyable and which emphasize oral proficiency, vocabulary acquisition, or writing skills. When students participate in post-reading activities that are meaningful and have clear goals, they are more likely to feel motivated to continue reading (Chen, 2018). Most of the literature on these types of practices supporting ER focus on the act of reading: book reviews, interviews with characters, and writing news articles about events in the story are just a few examples (Jacobs & Renandya, 2015), but activities connecting reading and writing have also been proposed (Bamford & Day, 2004).

### **The Extensive Reading-Writing Connection**

There are many studies in the academic literature investigating the connection between reading and writing. Findings have shown that the amount of reading is directly related to improvement in writing skills in both L1 and L2 (Ahmed, Wagner & Lopez, 2014; Lee, 2001, 2005; Lee & Hsu, 2009; Lee & Krashen, 1996, 2002; Olson, 2011; Zhang, 2018). Studies focusing on the impact of ER on writing generally focus on the following criteria: fluency, accuracy, word count, range of language structure, expression, complex structure, general improvement, content, organization, and language use (Han, 2010; Mermelstein, 2015; Park, 2016; Sakurai, 2017; Tsang, 1996). Iranian EFL students who participated in a semester long ER program showed improvement in their writing in terms of overall accuracy, run on sentences, and word choice (Azizi et al., 2020). In a study conducted with Taiwanese university students, participants in the ER treatment group showed significant gains compared to the control group in writing fluency, content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics (Mermelstein, 2015). Park (2016) compared two EAP writing classes: the control group received the traditional academic writing instruction along with grammar practice, while the treatment group had the same type of instruction

coupled with an ER component. The ER group engaged in Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) sessions—the practice of reading silently for 10 to 20 minutes during class time as part of ER—in class along with follow-up activities designed to develop both writing and reading skills. There were also word targets assigned for homework. While both groups showed improvement in writing skills after one semester, the gains in content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics were significantly higher for the ER group (Park, 2016). In her 2017 study, Sakurai looked at improvement in writing skills for the following criteria: task achievement, coherence and cohesion, lexical resource, and language use. The Japanese undergraduate students who participated were split into two groups: those with no ER experience, and those conducting ER. The findings of her study showed a significant correlation between the number of words read and scores in vocabulary and grammar use. Students who read more than 108,000 words in a 15-week academic semester could write better lexically and grammatically (Sakurai, 2017).

### **Creative Writing in Language Learning**

Creative abilities are critical in attempting to formulate solutions for academic, social and global issues, and there is ample evidence in education research to support this (Amabile, 1989; Brown, 1989; Plucker et al, 2004). In order to educate students in a school offering tracks in various fields within public and international policy as well as education, it is important to foster not only critical thinking, but also creativity. Many educational researchers have proposed the idea that creativity can be developed through reading and writing for both L1 and L2 learners (Babae, 2015; Carter, 2004; McVey, 2008; Sturgell, 2008; Wang, 2012). Yang (2020) created a pedagogical framework for teaching writing in a foreign language and demonstrated the application in a creative writing course. His framework emphasized four factors: relationship, agency, identity, and power. Kamata (2016) and Alysouf (2020) used cento poems in L2 writing classes. A cento poem is made up of lines from several other works. The students thus have to read a lot of poetry, analyze the vocabulary and structure, and get a sense of the meaning before creating their cento poems. Alysouf's (2020) study found positive effects on student motivation, while Kamata (2016) concluded that L2 learners who are exposed to creative texts can acquire skills for academic writing. Hanauer (2015) has shown that writer's voice is present and statistically measurable in poems written by L2 learners. Hanauer argues that

creative writing should be part of the curriculum for EFL/ESL students because “this pedagogy develops writer’s voice, emotional engagement, and ownership” (Hanauer, 2015). Spiro (2014) argues that when L2 learners begin to develop writer’s voice, they start to acquire ownership over the language studied. Despite the growing evidence on the positive influence of creative writing in the EFL/ESL classroom, it still holds a marginal place in curriculum development.

### **Extensive Reading and Creative Writing**

Regarding the potential connection between ER and creative writing, there are very few studies. In the *Extensive reading activities for teaching language* (Bamford & Day, 2004), a compilation of post-ER follow-up activities, there are two creative writing exercises included from contributing authors: *Once Upon a Time* by Claire Hitosugi and *My Own Story* by Anne Burns. Building on these activities, Hadiyanto (2019) looked at the idea that ER can have a positive influence on creative writing. In her study, Indonesian students in a teacher preparatory course participated in an ER program for which they were expected to read 1250 pages from graded readers. At the end of the school semester, they had to work in groups to select 10 new words from the books they had read and use them as the basis for writing a 1000-word story. Three teachers and six students were interviewed about their experience in the program, and their perceptions about ER and creative writing were analyzed. Hadiyanto (2019) concluded that “[the] quality of the story was perceived to be significantly influenced by the students’ reading behaviors.” The students who were interviewed stated that they were able to improve their writing skills by modelling their stories on the books’ characters, plot line, and genre. The teachers’ statements also seemed to support these beliefs.

Hadiyanto’s study has some serious limitations: there is no mention of the students’ sociolinguistic abilities, the levels and types of graded readers used, or how the students’ reading progress was tracked. Counting the number of pages read does not provide a clear measure of the amount of reading: depending on the level and publisher, the same number of pages could have completely different word counts. The role of the instructor in these ER programs is also not clearly elucidated: there is no mention of how or if the instructors guided the students in the creative writing process or in their engagement with ER. The author claims that both instructors and students “also agreed on the connection between reading and writing.”

However, this statement needs to be elaborated upon to make this connection clearer. One interesting point that bears raising is the “ER in reverse” idea that the writer uses to justify creative writing occupying a larger role in the ER classroom. According to Hadiyanto, the collaborative project and the peer-review process also served as a form of ER: by reading and critiquing their peers’ stories, the students were actually conducting ER. This is an interesting idea that should be investigated in more detail. More research is needed to determine how ER and creative writing feed into each other, especially for L2 learners.

### **Extensive Reading in the Core EAP Program**

Typically, most reading courses at university, and in the writer’s department as well, are a blend of IR and ER, with IR being the focus of classroom instruction and ER being implemented through homework assignments. Sustained silent reading (SSR) is not put into practice in any of the reading courses in the EAP program discussed here. In 2002, Day and Bamford conducted a meta-study of the academic literature on the practice of ER and decided upon a list of ten principles for implementing a successful ER program at academic institutions (Day & Bamford, 2002; see Appendix A). Since ER must be tied to some form of assessment for university EAP programs, a lot of the ER components tend to emphasize certain criteria that come into conflict with Day & Bamford’s guidelines. For example, the third principle states that students should be able to select their own reading material, according to their interests (Day & Bamford, 2002). However, in the core reading courses of the EAP program in the author’s department, students are often assigned books. They are required to reach a target number of words read, as well as take comprehension quizzes upon completing a book. These practices contradict the principles that state “Reading is its own reward” and “The purpose is usually pleasure, information, and general understanding” (Day & Bamford, 2002).

At the beginning of the semester in reading classes, students are given a brief introduction to ER: initially they are assigned the same books, then in the fifth week of the semester they are taught how to select books at their own level. Aside from checking their word counts at the end of the semester, few or no classroom activities are allotted for ER.

### **An Elective Course Syllabus: Creative Writing in the Extensive Reading Classroom**

To fill the perceived need for better ER instruction in the core EAP program, an elective semester-long course called “Reading to Write, Writing to Read” was introduced. The EAP program for which this elective course was created is implemented at the undergraduate level. All incoming first- and second-year students have to successfully complete it in order to be able to take part in English-only, or English-Japanese hybrid courses in their final years of study. The school offers five tracks of study: policy studies, applied informatics, urban studies, international policy studies, and education. After enrollment, students are assessed using the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) test and assigned to one of two different streams based on their English language proficiency scores. Upon completing one year of the EAP program, students in the higher stream are eligible to take elective courses. These elective content-based courses represent opportunities to learn about a topic while improving language skills. The elective courses offered vary each semester and include topics such as economics, globalization, philosophy, poetry, and disaster volunteerism, to name a few. “Reading to Write, Writing to Read” is described as a creative writing course in the syllabus: while conducting ER is the main goal of the course, creative writing is the new skill which students are supposed to master through follow up activities that build on and encourage ER.

The writing skills taught in the core courses of this EAP program focus mostly on sentence and paragraph mechanics, as well as introducing academic language and writing skills. Students focus on meeting paragraph goals and mastering the skills of paraphrasing and summarizing ideas from sources, so they have few opportunities to insert their own opinions or elaborate on the topics discussed in their essays. There is a certain potential for creative thinking when students are asked to come up with policy level solutions for a Problem-Cause-Solution essay that they are required to write in their second year, but most students find this incredibly challenging or prefer to seek a solution proposed in the literature.

The creative writing elective course discussed in this paper has three main goals:

- I. Recycle skills taught in the core courses of the EAP program. In this case, those skills are reading, discussion, presentation, and peer-review.

- II. Introduce creative writing to encourage students to express their own ideas.
- III. Use creative writing as a tool to teach students how to read for pleasure or implement extensive reading.

The third goal was created to address Day & Bamford’s fifth principle for creating a successful ER program: chiefly, that reading should be something that students do for pleasure, something that they find useful and that has some aesthetic value (Day & Bamford, 2002). According to Ana Kuzmicova, a scholar in literary studies and cognitive development: “Defined as vicarious sensorimotor experiencing, mental imagery is a powerful source of aesthetic enjoyment in everyday life and, reportedly, one of the commonest things readers remember about literary narratives in the long term. Furthermore, it is positively correlated with other dimensions of reader response, most notably with emotion” (Kuzmicova, para.1, 2013). Kuzmicova’s studies not only call into question the way we are assessing ER, with short multiple-choice questions aimed at recalling facts and general ideas from texts, but also suggests that texts should serve as a source of aesthetics in the reader’s life. Although Kuzmicova’s research focuses on the L1 context, the principles can be applied to the L2 classroom as well. In children’s literature, for example, this sense of aesthetics is showcased with colorful illustrations, quirky characters, or play on words. For this elective course, creative writing was introduced as a source of aesthetics meant to encourage students to engage with the texts in a more meaningful manner. For example, to make the learners aware of creative writing techniques, the texts that they are reading can be used as resources or examples for how to apply these techniques. In other words, creative writing can play a role in the follow up activities that ER researchers recommend (Chen, 2018; Day et al., 2015; Green, 2005; Stoller and Holiday, 2005). It is the author’s hypothesis that by teaching students to become more creative writers, they are also learning how to be better, or rather, more critical readers.

### **Course Outline and Implementation**

This course was taught over the duration of a 12-week semester, during which the creative writing skills emphasized are sensory and color imagery, inference skills, character development, writing from a third perspective, and dialogue development. Each class begins with a 15-minute Sustained Silent Reading (SSR)

session, during which the instructor participates as well in order to serve as a role model, a practice encouraged by Day & Bamford (2002). To emphasize the reading for pleasure principle, comprehension quizzes have not been introduced. Instead, students keep track of their reading through a Reading Log, in which they record information about the books they read: the title, author, publisher, reading level and total words. This Reading Log is collected in Week 6 and at the end of the semester, in Week 12. A target of 13,000 words per week is set as the goal for a perfect score for the reading component. 6,500 words per week represent a 60% passing score. The rationale for this was that students were shown to achieve significant linguistic and reading improvement after about 70,000 words read over the course of a 15 week semester (Sakurai, 2015).

To gauge students' comprehension and encourage an atmosphere that is conducive to reading for pleasure, after every session of SSR, students engaged in activities designed to share information and opinions about the books they were reading. To avoid routine, these activities varied from week to week and were closely tied to the creative writing skills that were being introduced throughout the course. For example, when students were learning a creative writing skill, they were asked to search for examples of it in the books they were reading. This was especially helpful for teaching them how to construct dialogue. Because of the way Japanese texts of fiction are structured and organized on a page, lower-level students were often not aware when they were encountering dialogue in their graded readers. Making them aware of how dialogue can be formatted, helped them with reading comprehension. Students became aware that quotation marks indicated that someone was talking, even when there were no tags (*he/she said*) attached, as in the dialogue below:

Bill and Mac were surprised to see the gun laying down on the path. Bill bent down and started reaching his hand out.

“I wouldn't do that if I were you.”

“I'll take my chances,” said Bill.

Mac sighed and gave up. Bill did what Bill wanted, and this was no different.

Students were asked to circle the lines of dialogue and to indicate who is speaking and how they have reached that conclusion. The standard punctuation rules for dialogue were elicited: students were given a guided discovery document and worked in pairs with their ER texts to

figure out how punctuation is used. They were shown how dialogue is introduced in a narrative in its own paragraph, and how action performed by a speaker is best kept within the same paragraph as the lines of that speaker, so that readers can keep track of who is talking. Moreover, they were asked to rate different dialogues from various sources introduced by the instructor and also from their weekly readings, in order to encourage them to develop their own style of writing.

The writing component of the course consisted of weekly writing assignments which culminated in a short story as the final project of the semester. A minimum set of requirements for the final project was introduced in Week 6. The final narrative had to include examples of the writing techniques taught in class and at least one exchange in the form of dialogue. Also, two main characters had to be developed. Scaffolding was provided in the form of questionnaires designed to help the students flesh out their characters and imagine them as they would be in real life. Throughout this process, students were also asked to consider the characters in their ER reading materials and think about their personality and motivation for acting in certain situations. From Week 6 onwards, students worked on different parts of their stories by focusing on the plot from the perspective of one character, then the other. In Week 11, they had to combine their short writing assignments into a final story. There was no word count limit or minimum set for this. A rubric was created and shared in Week 6 to help the students understand how to craft their stories and how they will be scored. It was important to orient the students on the use of this rubric, since 40% of the score for the final project was awarded by fellow classmates, who would read and award points to stories using this rubric. Involving students with the scoring process was intended to incentivize them to share their opinions as readers, to consider their audience as writers, and also to further engage them with reading in a “ER in reverse” sense (Hadiyanto, 2019).

To build audience awareness, at each stage of the drafting process, students would engage in peer-review of each other's drafts based on a guided questionnaire created for this purpose. The peer-review was conducted blindly, which encouraged students to be more forthcoming in their comments. To provide incentive for participation in the peer-review process, the quality of their comments and feedback was also assessed. The peer-review became a lot easier to implement in the spring semester of 2020, when the advent of COVID-19 and emergency remote teaching



(ERT) led to the use of different online resources. ERT signifies the temporary switch from regular face-to-face lessons to an online format. This digital style of teaching could be synchronous, with lessons where teachers and students can meet in regular sessions on Zoom, or asynchronous, where the materials and assignments are provided online and the teacher is available during office hours or by appointment.

### Regular versus Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) implementation

This course was taught in regular face to face classes in the fall semester of 2019, and in an asynchronous ERT format in the spring semester of 2020. The decision for asynchronous classes was made by the school administrators in order not to disadvantage students with limited access to Wi-Fi or devices, as these students might not be able to participate in online synchronous lessons. The ERT implementation was a valuable lesson and will lead to major modifications when this course will be taught again in the coming years.

In the regular version of the course, students were encouraged to use the graded readers or English books available in the university library. Because this is a creative writing course and the texts served as resources for writers, students were instructed to select only works of fiction. One of the main concerns was how to prevent and combat cheating. Also, a lot of the graded readers in the school library were used for the core EAP reading courses, so an overlap would have been inevitable. Therefore, the instructor created a private collection of graded readers from different publishers, spanning a wide range of levels and featuring only works of fiction from different genres. These graded readers were different from what was already available in the library. Students could only borrow and read books from this course collection, or they could bring regular, non-graded English works of fiction with the instructor's permission. The instructor kept track of the books borrowed from the collection and compared this list against the student Reading Logs to combat cheating. According to the list, the most popular series were the Cambridge Graded Readers. Very few students read at the Starter, Level 1 or 2. The majority made selections from levels 3 to 5. Frequently borrowed titles were as follows:

- Cambridge Series Level 3: *Double Cross, Tales of the Supernatural, The Beast*
- Cambridge Series Level 4: *The University Murders, Love in the Lakes*

- Cambridge Series Level 5: *Jungle Love, Emergency Murder, Dragon's Eggs, A Tangled Web*

Some students chose to read non-graded works of fiction by Sidney Sheldon, Dan Brown, J.K. Rowling, and Roald Dahl.

In the ERT version, the reading options and library were widely expanded through the introduction of Xreading.com, an online platform for which students can purchase membership to gain access to digital graded readers from a variety of publishers as well as original texts written specifically for the site. The Xreading.com option made it easy to keep track of the students' reading, as the site tracked reading speeds and total words read. This was especially important for the ERT version of the course, since these classes were supposed to be taught asynchronously, and aside from office hours, there was very limited direct interaction with the students. The class materials were provided on Luna, the university's intranet containing a modified version of Blackboard. Students received weekly announcements on Luna with links to video lectures pre-recorded by the instructor and reminders about upcoming deadlines. Written assignments were submitted on Turnitin, which is an online plagiarism-detection resource, but which also serves as a way for teachers to receive, correct, and score essays. Student essays were downloaded from Turnitin, all identifying personal information was removed, and each essay was assigned a number. These anonymous essays were then uploaded to Luna, and students were asked to read and comment on their peers' work. A rubric was provided along with a video tutorial with instructions on usage. Students read, scored each other's work with the rubric, and provided open-ended comments to a series of questions posted in discussion boards on Luna. Participation in these discussion boards was tracked and was part of the final score.

The switch to Xreading.com and Blackboard for peer-review were popular with both students and administrators, and they will be retained when the course will return to regular sessions. In regular face-to-face classes in the fall semester, students were submitting assignments for scoring and similarity check to Turnitin, but since the classes where the course was held did not have computer labs, students had to also print out and bring to class paper drafts of their writing assignments for peer-review. The use of Blackboard made it especially easy to share all students' writing assignments and allow students to comment anonymously on the

quality of the writing. Compared to regular classes, in the ERT version the quantity, length and overall quality of the feedback in peer-reviews was a lot better and more profound in scope.

### **A profile of the students & their perspectives on the course**

At the beginning of the spring semester of 2020, when the ERT version of the course was implemented, students were surveyed in English about their reading habits on Blackboard (See Appendix B). This survey was created by the instructor and has been used in other ER programs taught by the instructor. The survey questions were open-ended, and students had access to them on Luna, in Week 1 of the course. Seventy-five students (34 female, 41 male) responded. 10% indicated that they do not enjoy reading in either L1 or L2. 65% said that they enjoy reading for pleasure and the top choices for reading materials were novels and magazines. Only 25% of students claimed to enjoy reading in English. The main reasons given for why they do not read in English were: 1) they do not have time, 2) it is too difficult, and 3) they dislike reading in general. The course load for students in this EAP program is quite heavy, with some students having to complete 14 to 18 credits per semester. In addition, many students work part-time and have a very long commute to campus. It is possible that reading in either Japanese or English might seem daunting with such a busy schedule.

At the end of the semester, the students were surveyed again to gauge if their attitude towards reading had changed. The survey was created by the instructor as part of the regular process of feedback and evaluation that all courses in the EAP program are required to undergo in the final week. The questions were open-ended (see Appendix C) and students could access them on the Luna site. Sixty-nine students responded to the survey. 83% indicated that they enjoyed reading books for this class. 58% preferred Xreading.com over paperback graded readers: the top reason for this was that they enjoyed the audio function. 91% said that creative writing helped them to enjoy reading. 68% said that learning creative writing helped them understand what they read. 62% checked "Yes" for "I will continue to read in English after this course ends." To gain a more profound understanding of students' reading habits and the potential ER-creative writing connection, a more powerful survey instrument would have to be designed. Although the questions were open-ended, most students provided very terse Yes/No answers without

elaborating on the reasons for their selections. Another option would be to compare the reading amounts to a regular reading class in the core EAP program, to see whether students engaged with creative writing are reading more.

### **Conclusion**

It is possible that creative writing can serve as a resource for helping students to engage in a more meaningful manner with extensive reading, but this statement needs to be verified with a carefully selected experimental design. One observation that seems to support this idea is that many students continued reading in English beyond the scope of the course. Although "Reading to Write, Writing to Read" was just a 12-week course, the Xreading cards that the students bought were valid for one year. When the student accounts were checked 3 months after the end of the semester, 39 out of 75 students originally enrolled were continuing to read an average of 6000 words per week. It would be important to follow up with students to make sure that they are reading for pleasure and not using their membership to complete work for other courses.

Using works of fiction as resources for creative writing facilitated students' understanding of certain writing techniques and the incorporation of these techniques into their own writing assignments was more easily achieved. The main challenge lay in finding good lower-level graded readers that would contain examples of some of the writing techniques that were taught in this course. In regular classes, this necessitated a search and sampling of different books on offer from various publishers, a long process, but a process that could be accomplished. Some of the lower-level graded readers used were: Compass Classic Readers Level 1 (Aesop's Fables, Grimm's Fairy Tales, The Jungle Book), Cambridge Graded Readers Level 1 (Bad Love, Just Like A Movie), Page Turners Level 2 (He's Mine, Road Trip, Somebody Better). With the introduction of Xreading in the ERT semester, the options became more varied, and it was easier to search for and recommend good graded readers that served the purpose of instruction.

Future implementation of this course will contain a blend of ERT elements, such as the use of Turnitin, Blackboard, and Xreading.com, since these features were user-friendly and popular with students and greatly facilitated instruction and interaction with peers, especially in the peer-review process. A possible direction for future research should also include an

analysis of the peer-review process in regular face-to-face classes versus the Luna discussion board workshops.

### Author Biography

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## Appendix A

### *Day and Bamford Ten Principles of Extensive Reading*

1. The reading material is easy.
2. A variety of materials on a wide range of topics is available.
3. Learners choose what they want to read.
4. Learners read as much as possible.
5. Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower.
6. The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information, or general understanding.
7. Reading is individual and silent.
8. Reading is its own reward.
9. The teacher orients and guides the students.
10. The teacher is a role model for the learners.

(Adapted from Day and Bamford, 2002).

## Appendix B

### *Reading Habits Survey*

This survey will not be used as part of your score. The answers will be kept anonymous and will be used to help your teacher learn how to improve this course. Thank you for your participation.

1. Do you enjoy reading in Japanese? Why?/Why not?
2. What do you enjoy reading in your language? Circle your answers:  
books                      magazines                      internet articles                      newspapers                      comic books                      social media sites  
other: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Do you have a favorite book or writer? If so, what is the book's title and what is it about?
4. Do you read in English? If you answered Yes, what do you read in English?
5. Do you like reading in English? Why?/Why not?

## Appendix C

### *End of Semester Survey*

This survey will not be used as part of your score. The answers will be kept anonymous and will be used to help your teacher learn how to improve this course. Thank you for your participation.

1. Compared to September, do you enjoy reading in English more? Why?/Why not?
  2. Did you enjoy reading books for this class? Why?/Why not?
  3. In your EC3 Reading class, you had to use graded readers. Do you prefer reading graded readers or reading on Xreading.com? Circle your answer and explain why you selected it.  

Graded Readers	Xreading.com
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  4. Did learning about creative writing help you to enjoy reading in this class? Why?/Why not?
  5. Did learning creative writing help you to better understand the books you were reading for this class?
  6. Will you continue reading in English after this course? Why?/Why not?
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*Interview***An Interview with Iain Maloney, Author, Editor, Journalist, and Teacher,  
on the State of Literature and Creative Writing in EFL**

Jared Michael Kubokawa

*Aichi University*

Assistant professor at Aichi University and LiLT SIG member Jared Michael Kubokawa sat down virtually with LiLT Journal Assistant Editor Iain Maloney for a wide-ranging conversation about LiLT SIG and perspectives on the roles of literature and creative writing (CW) in EFL.

**Key words:** creative writing, literature in language teaching

**Tell me a little bit about yourself.**

I'm originally from Aberdeen, Scotland, and now I live in Gifu Prefecture. I've been in Japan for about 15 years following the usual teaching career path. I have published a number of books and write regularly for outlets around the world, but most often for *The Japan Times*.

**How did you begin using literature in your language classroom?**

My undergraduate degree is in English Literature and my masters is in Creative Writing. My first teaching position was in the U.K. on a university access course helping prepare mature students for a return to higher education. For me, literary texts and education have always been intertwined. Working in language schools in Japan usually doesn't provide much scope to incorporate literature into a language classroom, but once I moved into the university system nothing was going to stop me.

**In the *PanSIG Journal* (2019b), you discuss the approach of comparing texts in “divergent, contrastive ways” (p. 207). Could you tell me a bit more about how you choose the literature and your contrastive pedagogy?**

Choosing literature for the classroom is an inexact science. Firstly, you can only really choose from the pool of literature you already know well. Secondly, every class has its own level, its own dynamics and personality, so texts that work well with one group may not be so

successful with another. For example, I've taught a poetry course over the last few years. One class was really interested in *haiku* written in English by non-Japanese writers while another class was less interested in those poems and much more fascinated by Japanese haiku that had been translated into English. There will always be a certain amount of trial and error.

As for the contrastive element, one of the biggest problems I found with teaching creative writing—to L1 or L2 speakers—is that many students assume there is a correct way of doing things, so consequently a number of incorrect ways. That's reinforced in academic writing classes where there are clearly defined rules regarding things like structure, referencing, and citations. Creative writing is different. The only rule is “does it work?” One method I've found successful is to show students how different writers approach the same task. In my travel writing class, for example, we look at up to six different opening paragraphs and examine how each one works within its own specific aims (Maloney, 2018).

**How do you get students involved? How can language teachers invite students to make meaning and discuss texts?**

The students need to generate the meaning and the discussion. If I lecture them on what I think a text means, all they learn is what I think about it. By getting students to work together, and by not overloading them—giving them time to really dig into a text at their own pace—they will unearth the things that interest them and

therefore have more ownership over the class. Sue Sullivan (2015) has done some great research on this. In a creative writing class, the literature is there to act as a catalyst, or an example, not as a recipe to be followed. So what a student finds useful and important in a text may be something I hadn't considered, and that's the joy of literature. As with anything in education, some students get into it quickly, others are resistant, some need coaxing while others need guiding. The most important thing is to understand that there can be multiple—even contradictory—readings of a text so encourage whatever avenue of thought the text leads them down.

**What troubles and triumphs have you experienced while bringing literature into your language classes? How does it relate to EFL writing and composition pedagogy?**

The most obvious success has been in getting students to enjoy L2 writing. Academic writing classes are rarely a student's favourite class and they are never shy in telling you this. Creative writing is supposed to be fun. It's freeing, it allows them to use all the language they've spent years accumulating in interesting and unusual ways and I've had many students tell me that they've never looked forward to a writing class before.

As for troubles, beyond the obvious things you get with every class—the student who would rather be somewhere else, the student who didn't do the homework and so isn't prepared for class, that kind of thing—the worst classes are when I've chosen a text that doesn't work. Sometimes I misjudge the level and the entire class is taken up with just trying to understand the text. Other times there can be culture-specific things that cause misunderstandings. If you have the wrong text then the class will just grind to a halt. But that's the process. Not every class will be a winner when you are developing a new course and trying out new materials.

**On the topic of writing, you have published a number of works in prose and poetry. The latest being *The Only Gaijin in the Village* (Maloney, 2020), a memoir about life in Japan. Could you walk me through how you became an author?**

Like all authors, I'm a failed rock star. I started writing songs when I was a teenager which developed into bad adolescent poetry and eventually bad adolescent short stories. I started getting published while I was an undergraduate and did my masters in Creative Writing. I graduated that course in 2004 but my first book wasn't

published until 2014. How did I become an author? By writing and writing and writing and writing and writing and eventually something I wrote was good enough to become a book. There's no great secret to it, unfortunately. No shortcuts.

**In “The Only Gaijin in the Village” you share a thought-provoking philosophy about Japan: “The first rule of living in Japan is: show willingness” (Maloney, 2020, p. 11). Could you elaborate on this a bit more please?**

I say it's the first rule of living in Japan but really it's the first rule of being a new person in any situation—don't come in with your mind made up, with fixed attitudes and behaviours. You have to be willing to try and to change. Many of the people I've seen struggle to live in Japan are people who have a set idea of how things should be based solely on their own experiences to date and are unwilling to question those assumptions. That's not to say that all hardships faced are the fault of the immigrant, of course not, but thinking “Japan should change to fit me” is just going to lead to stress and disappointment.

**While teaching at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies you were able to create a curriculum for CW within their EAP program. How has your philosophy of showing willingness helped you in this endeavor?**

The university was open to the idea of adding creative writing to the curriculum in theory, but they weren't convinced there would be much demand for it, or that they could justify adding it at the expense of something else, which is totally understandable. So for my first year there I ran an extracurricular class a couple of evenings a week. I had to give up my free time to do it, and it was entirely voluntary, but it was worth it. Even though the students weren't getting any credit for the course, around a dozen signed up for each class. The numbers plus the feedback from the students convinced the department that there was demand for the course (Maloney, 2019a).

**I love your quote about writing and teaching CW: “Anyone who can learn to write, can learn to write creatively. Anyone who can teach writing, can teach creative writing. All that remains is the will to do so” (Maloney, 2019a, p. 19). What would you recommend to other EFL teachers who are**

**interested in bringing CW into their classes? Are there any potential pitfalls to look out for?**

The biggest pitfall is, as I mentioned before, thinking that there's a correct way to write creatively. Anything goes, as long as it works, as long as it achieves the aims of that specific text. If it's horror, is it scary? If it's comedy, is it funny? Things like that. If you try to teach creative writing like academic writing then you'll kill all the creativity before you get going. In many ways teaching creative writing is much easier than teaching academic writing. You're not trying to corral a student's ideas into a specific structure, for example, and not worrying about thesis statements or topic sentences and certainly not thinking about APA or anything like that. That's why I said anyone who can teach writing, can teach creative writing. It's very freeing.

**In the winter 2019 *LiLT Journal*, you discuss using literature examples by such authors as Iain Banks, Alex Garland, and Haruki Murakami to highlight specific writing techniques: "One aim of this lesson was to connect techniques in CW with techniques the students had already learned in their academic writing" (p. 7). Can you tell us a bit more about this technique, please?**

Very few of the students I've taught have done any creative writing, even in L1, so they tend to be a little apprehensive at the start. One way to overcome that is to link something they don't know to something they do know. In the class on opening paragraphs, for example, once they've done their own digging and analysis, and we have a white board full of their ideas, I draw their attention to features that can be analogous to things I know they have learned in their academic writing classes. In *The Beach*, the opening sentence "The first I heard of the beach was in Bangkok, on the Khao San Road" can be thought of as being analogous to a thesis statement (Garland, 1997, p. 5). It's telling us this book is about a beach, a beach in Thailand, the beach is unusual, or special in some way, because the character only found out by word of mouth ("I heard about it") and, if you know the reputation of the Khao San Road, then you know just from this sentence that it's going to be a book about young backpackers. That process of breaking things down in that way and comparing them to ideas they are familiar with provides a bridge between the concrete and abstract. We remember great opening lines because they manage to introduce the text perfectly, the way a good thesis statement should.

**At Aichi University, I have seen an increase in students' motivation after participating in CW workshops. How have your students responded? What outcomes have you witnessed so far?**

Certainly, they look on L2 writing in a more positive light. I think it also has enormous benefits for their confidence. I'm working on a paper just now that looks at this. One of the great things about creative writing is that students can do it with any level of English (Maloney, 2019a). Obviously, a beginner isn't going to write a 900-page novel, but they could write a haiku or an acrostic [poem], for example. Creative writing doesn't require students to learn new vocabulary or structures, but it does allow them to explore what they have already learned and to use it in new and interesting ways. My hypothesis is that this process will give them greater confidence in their L2 ability overall. One thing students regularly tell me is that they struggle to share their opinions, to talk about their feelings. I find this in Japanese as well. Creative writing classes allow students the freedom and gives them the support to practice this. I've witnessed it anecdotally and now, hopefully, my data will support that conclusion.

**That is great. I believe that language teachers can and should utilize CW more often in their classrooms. You have written that "CW may be the most under-used tool in the EFL box" (Maloney, 2019a, p. 18). Can you elaborate a bit more on this?**

A year or so ago someone contacted me via email about a paper they were working on looking at how creative writing was taught in Japan. She asked me a few questions, then said "Can you put me in touch with other creative writing teachers?" and then listed a few people she had already contacted. That list comprised everyone I've ever heard of who teaches creative writing at university in Japan. It's still very niche. Many people seem to think it's a waste of time, or that it's very low on the list of priorities. Now I'm biased, but I'd say that creative writing has so many benefits for second language acquisition across the board that it is odd not to use it.

**Hypothetically speaking, if a professor were to choose one of your novels as the topic for a university course, what novel would you choose and why?**

For an EFL class, *The Waves Burn Bright* would probably make the most sense. *First Time Solo* contains a lot of



Scottish dialect that may be tricky for L2 readers, as well as a few scenes that are probably not safe for the classroom. *The Waves Burn Bright* deals with a number of issues that would make for interesting discussion classes, and a number of writing techniques that could be fun to explore in a CW class.

**Thank you for your time and wisdom, Iain. I am sure that the readers have gained a number of important insights. Best of luck in your teaching and writing endeavors.**

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*Forum report*

## **The Author Isn't Dead, Just a Little Shy: Practical Criticism and Workshopping in the EFL Classroom**

Luke Draper

*Kwansei Gakuin University*

In the context of higher education EFL in Japan, there is often an emphasis on criticality. Especially in the skill of reading, it is insufficient to read passively, and learners are encouraged to critically engage with texts through various reader response activities. Similarly, in writing classes – composition, academic or creative writing – educators often include peer feedback workshops in the classroom, requiring learners to read and respond to their classmates' writing to offer constructive criticism and assist with revisional decisions. Although peer feedback workshops can yield constructive learning opportunities, they may also present certain psychological obstacles for learners who are inclined more toward face-saving interactions and are unwilling to engage in Face-Threatening Acts such as negatively criticizing a peer's writing. Also, in a hierarchical society like Japan where many classes are teacher-centered, learners may feel uncomfortable in the perceived role of teacher when evaluating their peers' writing (Nelson & Carson, 1998). On a more acute level, interactions in workshops can demonstrate particularly negative tendencies. As Gross (2010) claims, "the bullying, the blandness and the babble, and the crucifying silences. . . All the worst things people say about writing workshops are, or can be, true" (p. 52).

This report looks to the concept of Practical Criticism as a possible solution for these interactive obstructions. Practical Criticism is a critical approach to reading that focuses on the text itself, independently and isolated from its social, historical and cultural context. For example, if an English translation of the short story *Rashōmon* by Ryūnosuke Akutagawa was set as a reading activity in a reading or literature class, students may approach the text influenced by their individual knowledge and preconceptions: They may have a formed consciousness of the narrative, the historical context and their implications to the narrative and its overriding moral. They may also approach the story with

predeterminations of Akutagawa as an author, with their attitude toward the author and his works informed by their individual reading tastes and educational experiences. However, if the text was anonymized and disseminated with no preceding focus on the historical and cultural context of the narrative, the learner can approach the text with a more "organized response" (Richards, 1929), or a deeper understanding of the text formed from their own perspectives, interpretations and life experiences.

The term 'Practical Criticism' originated from the title of a book written by the literary critic and Cambridge professor I.A. Richards. The book reports on psychological experiments Richards conducted with students of literature at Cambridge University. Richards was primarily interested in the readers' response to the text rather than the text itself (West, 2017). He provided students with five anonymous poems for a critical and evaluative response. The poems varied in quality, with one that was deemed "worthless" by Richards. Richards was surprised to note that students responded favorably to the poems without literary merit more so than the acclaimed works, and this encouraged him to conduct more experiments to collect a broader range of responses. The experiment was innovative in that it was an early example of empirical research in the field of literary studies.

Though the term *Practical Criticism* denotes the experiment and not an actual model from which to approach reading, it continues to inform English Literary Studies' curricula from elementary to higher education around the world. As a concept, or a framework from which ESL teachers may approach their teaching, Practical Criticism may be a practical solution to allow our learners to approach texts with minimal presumption. It encourages the learner to read closely and construct meaning through their individual interpretations. This in turn promotes learner agency

and slants the focus away from the idea of “right” or “wrong” readings that is perpetuated through exercises such as skimming/scanning and true/false questions and focuses on responses informed by learner identity. As such, there is vast pedagogical merit in applying practical-critical exercises in classes that focus on extensive and intensive reading.

However, as mentioned previously, the writing class that prescribes peer feedback may also benefit from this approach. In a culturally-situated learning environment that avoids Face-Threatening Acts such as criticism and negative evaluation, peer feedback workshops can often be exercises in futility, where overt praise and positive value judgements may not generate many revisional ideas. Outside of this generalization, learners may also approach a text with certain bias, willing to praise their friends' writing or remain silent when discussing a stronger student's work, while overly critiquing a weaker or less popular learner's writing. Learners may also approach a text excessively influenced by their reading tastes if the text is creative or their cultural and political beliefs if the text is expository when they are pre-aware of the text's author. A practical-critical approach – the anonymization of the texts, occasional distribution of non-student-written texts and the emphasis on individual and independent response – may help eliminate these problems.

Especially in a rapidly evolving era of education provision, where COVID-19 has forced many practitioners to embrace technology as a significant mode of teaching, the opportunity for students to submit their writing for anonymous peer review has increased. Though it takes significant bravery for a

student to submit their writing, it may create a community of writers and readers that can develop their writing voices, enhance their critical reading skills and constructively respond to peer-written texts with confidence.

### Author Biography

*Luke Draper* is an Associate Lecturer of English at Kwansei Gakuin University in Hyogo, Japan and a PhD student in Linguistics at the University of Surrey. He has an MA in Creative Writing from the University of Chichester, UK. His academic interests include the Creative Writing workshop and interactions that occur within them, Literary Linguistics and how stylistic instruction may inform workshop discussions and student-writers' approaches to writing.

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*Forum report***Choosing and Teaching Texts of Discrimination and Diversity**

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The author has recently taught courses in the Language Education and Research center and in the Department of English Literature at a university in Tokyo. In the former, teaching freshman students, the author was tasked with a content and language integrated learning (CLIL) approach, which is conducted akin to an English literature course. In the latter, teaching senior students<sup>1</sup>, the author could freely select texts to study. In both courses, the focus was on texts relating to discrimination and diversity, as experienced by English-speaking narrators who are ethnic minorities in different parts of the world. The focus of these courses, in addition to English Literature, could also be placed under the umbrella of “Cultural Studies,” in as much as it engenders critical thinking about struggles of discrimination and diversity in different parts of the world and deals with the ways in which people view themselves and others. This paper outlines the reasons the author chose this particular focus, the texts selected for study, as well as the importance of selecting appropriate ones, and some class activities related to the readings. The essay concludes with a brief discussion of practical and theoretical considerations of teaching literature of discrimination and diversity.

What are the particular benefits of an English literature course focused on discrimination and diversity? The first is that literature study is potentially a useful academic pursuit for broadening students’ perspectives on and awareness of important issues outside of their own frame of reference. Kumashiro (2004) noted that some students’ tendency is to fall back on familiar ways of making sense of the world, with an accordant “resistance to learning other things, especially things that reveal the problematic nature of prior knowledge” (p. 24). Engagement with challenging themes that require critical thinking through analysis and discussion of literature encourages students to confront and challenge

their established perceptions. The second benefit of this focus is that issues of discrimination and diversity often have an aspect of personal interest and relevance to students who are invested in overseas study, English language study, international issues, or the like. In the author’s case, a large proportion of his students had either lived and studied overseas previously or were planning to do so. By studying narration of or about the social identities of ethnic minorities, students may come to appreciate that engaging with various and diverse perspectives allows a broader understanding of the complex international issues that may affect them, or that they may have already been affected by. With this in mind, presenting a broad range of perspectives on discrimination and diversity (male and female, East and West, old and young, oppressed and oppressor, etc.) is recommended. Kumashiro (2004) has noted that “exposure [to the writings of different groups of people] is especially important when we ask students to find connections between the text and their own life experiences” (p. 71). A wider range of experiences and perspectives in the texts may engage students who might otherwise not see themselves reflected in their course-assigned readings (Kumashiro, 2004, p. 71). Generally then, as Pohan (2000) notes, teachers of literature have the opportunity to broaden students’ views of themselves, others, past and future events, and human society in general.

This paper in no way suggests, however, that radically changing students’ positions, morals, or actions is enabled by the study of discrimination and diversity in literature. Nor is this necessarily desirable. The purpose of discussing and writing about such topics is not to change students *per se*, but rather to expose them to new and different viewpoints that will challenge them and encourage them to address their own positions about important issues (whether their positions change or not).

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<sup>1</sup> In both courses, the students’ English levels were approximately Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) B2, with some approaching C1.

It is generally the case that the growth and change of fundamental values and beliefs is a slow, ongoing process, which is unlikely to be observable to a classroom instructor over the course of a single semester or academic year. As Thein, et al. (2007) noted in a study about teaching multicultural literature to white students in the USA, an “increased willingness to ‘try on’ different perspectives” (p. 55) may occur slowly through such a course of study. Thein, et al. (2007):

by encountering tensions and trying on new perspectives, students experience changes that are often subtle, usually transitory, and frequently contradictory, that increase their understandings of *how* their beliefs and values are formed and *why* other people think differently. They therefore acquire the *capacity* itself to engage in and value perspective-taking through their literary experiences. (p. 55)

It is perhaps realistic to imagine literary studies about discrimination and diversity as opening new and sometimes challenging perspectives to students, but not as changing their thinking into any particular direction, including the instructor’s.

There are, of course, many suitable texts available for a focus on discrimination and diversity. A novel employed by the author over the past few years is *Obasan* (1981) by the Canadian writer Joy Kogawa. Shorter texts also discussed here include the story “Indian Education” from Sherman Alexie’s *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1994), the episode of the library card from Richard Wright’s autobiography *Black Boy* (1945), and George Orwell’s “Shooting an Elephant” (1936). All four texts invite discussion of discrimination (and diversity, especially in the case of *Obasan*), and each is narrated from the perspective of a member of a minority group.

Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan* concerns both the internment of Japanese-Canadians during World War II and their displacement and mistreatment for years after the war. This particular novel provides, for Japanese students, a comfortable position of intersectionality. The narrator, and central character, is a Canadian girl of Japanese ancestry whose older relatives are caught between Japanese and Canadian cultural values, partly depending on their generation of ancestry (*issei*, *nisei*, *sansei*), and who are forced into an impossible position by mass and systematic anti-Japanese discrimination during wartime. There are many familiar Japanese cultural aspects for students to connect with, even though the events of the

story occur almost entirely in Canada. The novel is written in the first-person perspective, which gives students the viewpoint of the female narrator as she grows from around age six to 17, with a framing narration by her at age 36. Because discrimination stories often focus on men, *Obasan* is notable for having a female author and central character, as well as the female titular character (an *issei*) who represents Japanese silence and tradition, and the aggressive *nisei* aunt who represents Western directness and aggression.

One of the fascinating aspects of teaching *Obasan* in Japan is that Japanese students are confronted by the characters’ (and this author’s) perspective of the Japanese-Canadian characters as entirely “Canadian,” regardless of cultural background. By contrast, some Japanese students tend towards thinking of the Japanese-Canadian characters as “Japanese” and the white-Canadian characters as “Canadian.” This lends itself to discussion about the discrepancy between perceptions of what nationality itself means to people in different parts of the world, and how this can relate to discrimination and diversity.

The three shorter texts mentioned are also written in the first-person, inviting students to see the world through the narrators’ eyes. Sherman Alexie is a Native American author, and the “Indian Education” story in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* is the experience of a young American Indian’s life “education” from the first grade through high school graduation and class reunion at two schools – one on, and one off, the reservation. The many experiences of discrimination faced by Native Americans in daily life are easily comprehensible for students and provide numerous starting points for discussion. As an example, when the narrator, Victor, is a teenager at a majority-white school, he is as yet unaware that he has diabetes. As a consequence of it, he briefly collapses on the basketball court during a game, prompting a Chicano teacher to comment that he has probably been drinking alcohol. The narrator learns the lesson that “sharing dark skin doesn’t necessarily make two men brothers” (Alexie, 1994, “Indian Education”, “Ninth Grade”). In class discussion, students often focus on this specific comment, and those who have lived overseas and experienced being a minority often have a personal connection to it.

From Richard Wright’s *Black Boy*, the author presents students with the passage regarding teenage Richard’s request to borrow a library card from a white coworker because African Americans in the south, in the

1920s, could not use public libraries. Having done so, and having successfully fooled a white librarian into thinking he has borrowed the books on behalf of his colleague, Richard immediately becomes obsessed with fiction and literature written by whites. Students can easily see how and why this opens up a new world to this “black boy” who has been segregated from the mainstream of American society, and who is desperate to educate himself. This selected passage ends with Richard weighing over the five or six possible future paths his life could conceivably take (e.g., fighting southern whites; submitting and giving up; transferring his anger onto other blacks; finding release in alcohol), and rejecting them all as unacceptable. It is instructive to ask students which of these options they would select, and why, had they been in Richard’s shoes at that time and in that place.

The third shorter text is George Orwell’s “Shooting an Elephant”, set in Myanmar (Burma) and again narrated in the first-person. Students experience the perplexing ambiguity the young Orwell feels as a British police officer at the center of imperialism. Orwell recounts that, though he did not want to, he was impelled by the expectant crowd of Burmese who followed him through the streets to shoot a runaway elephant that was rampaging and had killed an Indian coolie. Orwell concludes by stating that he did this merely to avoid looking like a fool. There are consistent metaphors of the stage and theater embedded in the narrator’s description of the event for students to break down, and inevitably the symbolism of the elephant itself is a common point of debate and discussion. But the most fascinating point of this story is the depiction of power relations between colonizer and colonized, as it remains unclear who is truly in control of this situation of imperialism. The author’s observed experience is that students understand this unstable power relation quite well in their first or second reading of the story. Then, the instructor’s challenge is to push students deeper into thinking, writing, and talking about what this instability might suggest about imperialism in general, or about specific historical efforts of colonizers to unsuccessfully convert locals to their own way of life.

Written response questions, which are regularly assigned as homework, are particularly good for eliciting

students’ individual thoughts in response to critical thinking questions. Examples of questions assigned for written responses are as follows:

- The title of the story is “Indian Education”. What does the word “education” mean in the context of this story? What are some examples of the education Indians (like Victor) receive? How does Victor, as narrator, feel about the education he received in his youth?
- In “Shooting an Elephant”, George Orwell states that he dislikes British imperialism, and that he supports the Burmese. However, we know that Orwell served for years in the British Imperial Police and in the story he talks strongly about his dislike for “the natives.” How can Orwell both support the Burmese and dislike them at the same time? And what might this tell us about Orwell’s views on imperialism?
- Consider Chapter 22’s six Japanese boys torturing a (white) chicken, and consider Chapter 23’s bathhouse events. Who is doing the discriminating in these scenes? Why are they doing it? Then, what might Joy Kogawa be suggesting about the nature of discrimination?

In class, group discussions on these and other topics give students some “safe space” in which to chat with one another, rather than to the teacher or to the whole class, which is advisable given the sensitive nature and weighty tone of much of the literature<sup>2</sup>. Students are also assigned individual presentations throughout the semester, and generally around three students will give a presentation on the same passage. Occasionally role-plays are used, during which students assume the position of a character in the story and need to imagine a realistic response or action of the story’s narrator in a given situation.

Debate is also a familiar and effective means of having students defend a position logically or rhetorically, including positions they are sometimes uncomfortable with. For example, near the end of the author’s CLIL-style course with freshmen, students receive the content of Figure 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Obasan*, for example, deals not only with Japanese-Canadian discrimination, but also the sexual abuse of children, marriage-less women, children’s trauma of growing up

without parents, and the issue of whether fighting against institutional racism is even a worthwhile pursuit.

**Figure 1**

*Handout given to students after studying the novel 'Obasan'*

<p>Too much diversity in one nation-state is a bad thing.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>1</b></p> <p>A great deal of diversity in any nation-state is a positive thing.</p>	<p>Imperialism and/or colonialism can have good effects on the country / culture it impacts.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>2</b></p> <p>Imperialism and/or colonialism is always bad for the country / culture it impacts.</p>	<p>Sometimes, it is better to forget the painful past rather than to remember and deal with it.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>3</b></p> <p>It is vital to remember and deal with mistakes of the past. This is how society improves and progresses.</p>
<p>The apology by the Canadian government to Japanese-Canadians (in 1988) was <i>the</i> most important thing, and the fact that the monetary reparations were somewhat small is less important.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>4</b></p> <p>The apology by the Canadian government was fine, but the small monetary reparation was <i>too</i> small, and thus undermines the government's attempt at a sincere apology.</p>	<p>The Japanese government / nation should do more to compensate nations such as China and Korea for its military actions of World War II.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>5</b></p> <p>The Japanese government / nation has done enough to compensate nations such as China and Korea for events of the distant past.</p>	<p>The people who represent the "majority" have a natural right and responsibility to decide the rules and laws of a society. This is fair and logical.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>6</b></p> <p>The people who are in the "minority" will always be discriminated against without laws and special policies to protect them.</p>

Figure 1 shows opposing positions regarding discrimination issues. (Topics 3, 4 and 5 relate directly to *Obasan*.) Students are sometimes assigned specific positions on Figure 1 and asked to debate with another student who defends the opposing position. Needless to say, gentleness and carefulness on the part of both the teacher and students are required to discuss the issues. There will inevitably be students who present unpopular or "politically incorrect" opinions, and teachers must treat these perspectives with the same respect shown to others.

Though the author does not – with the exception of Figure 1, topic 5 – address Japan itself or Japanese domestic issues in class, it is hoped that the Japanese students will reflect on discrimination experienced in their own lives or observed within their larger society.

Instructors must, of course, judge for themselves the readiness or suitability of a particular class to discuss such topics in a careful yet open way. It is the author's happy observation that many Japanese students exhibit consciousness of a continuum of discrimination, within all societies, including their own. While it is not the author's intention to push students towards a more critical view of their own society, it is a positive result of literature studies of discrimination when students have the opportunity to reflect on themselves and their own culturally-shared experiences through careful, critical thought. Carey-Webb (2001), in discussing a similar course approach in which his students read a novel relating to South African apartheid<sup>3</sup>, noted that his students brought the subject of the literature back around to themselves:

<sup>3</sup> Cry, *the Beloved Country* (1948) by Alan Paton

While I had an opinion, in this discussion it was important for me to hold it back, to let students explore the complexities and make up their own minds. We didn't come to a consensus... [but]... as they learned about apartheid keeping White and Black people ignorant of each other in South Africa, my suburban middle-class White students began to ask about the segregation that was still evident in our community. (p. 5)

The author has observed the same thing. For example, in class or small group discussions, students have voluntarily brought up historical matters such as Japan's ill-treatment of Southeast Asian workers, historical treatment of Koreans, or the like. Similarly, the author has observed Japanese students challenging other Japanese students' defense of Japan's actions in regard to these matters.

Pohan (2000) suggested that "the most effective and culturally responsive teachers are those who see opportunities to infuse multicultural content, issues, or multiple perspectives...into everything they do" (p. 24), while Boyd (2003) stated that "multicultural literature in the overall English Language Arts curriculum...is...[a] positive change to the study of literature [and] offers teachers and students a more realistic reflection of society, history, education, and schools" (p. 461). It will now be evident that the author agrees with these points, but it bears remembering that there can be a danger of reinforcing stereotypes in literary studies of discrimination and diversity, particularly for those instructors teaching in non-English-speaking countries where students often see only stereotypical images of minority groups from English cultures. Kumashiro (2004) notes that "Some writings can merely repeat stereotypes or create new ones by glossing over complexities, contradictions, and diversity, thereby suggesting that an entire culture or a group is *like this*" (p. 71). Indeed, the author has paused to question himself when presenting to students a broad history of African American oppression. Is it more harmful than beneficial to students' knowledge of the United States and African American culture by potentially reinforcing their school and media-saturated image of the oppressed African American? After consideration, it is the author's contention that well-chosen literature largely resolves this dilemma. Richard Wright's narration, for example, is not that of a passive victim, but rather of a highly intellectual person struggling, unyielding, within and

against his oppression. Likewise, though scholarly debate exists about the sarcasm and humor of Sherman Alexie's depiction of Native American life, the author's experience is that Japanese students recognize Victor's efforts to elevate himself above the disadvantaged station that American society assigns him, and they find this effort very admirable. Teachers who wish to teach with texts narrated by the marginalized but who are concerned about reinforcing stereotypes could choose books, stories, poems (or other) that depict an anti-oppressive struggle and that focus on the dignity of the oppressed. Further, teachers in Japan might simply select texts well outside of Japanese students' collective familiarity, so that students will approach it with few preconceptions. Wartime Japanese-Canadian discrimination, for example, is generally less familiar to Japanese students than, say, images of the African American struggle. The plight of the Burmese under British colonialism is another historical situation rarely encountered by the author's students.

Finally, it should be noted that some teachers may find it rather dark and depressing, for themselves and for students, to teach a course with the theme of discrimination and diversity. Teachers may also be wary of discussing the sensitive and controversial nature of its relevant themes with young students. The author's contention, however, based on his own experience, is that students respond well to the serious academic challenge this presents. As Carey-Webb (2001) has shared, in regards to his similar concerns about students' emotions after studying texts on the Holocaust or apartheid, and about possibly undermining students' enjoyment of literature study:

When such units are over I usually feel positive about the result, and discover yet again that careful reading, discussion, and writing about powerful subjects increases rather than numbs my students' human sensitivity. And I know that they can't wisely participate in the world unless they clearly understand it. (p. 19)

While the author would not want to make any grandiose claims about his own courses, his experience with such weighty texts and subject matters has also been very positive. No angry disputes in class discussions, nor negative feedback about course content from students, has been observed or received. As mentioned, however, instructors must judge for themselves what is suitable for their own particular students and courses, both in



terms of selecting appropriate texts and in terms of class tasks.

### Author Biography

Regan Tyndall teaches academic skills in English, and English literature, at Sophia University. He holds post-graduate degrees in Education and in English Literature, and is currently a doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership at the University of Calgary (Canada). His research interests include teacher training and professional development for Canadian public school teachers and the internationalization of Japanese university curricula. <regantyndall@gmail.com>

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*Conference report***Creative Writing in Language Teaching Contexts**

Luke Draper

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Mary Hillis

*Ritsumeikan University*

Tara McIlroy

*Rikkyo University*

*Creative Writing in Language Teaching Contexts* was a one-day event hosted by the Literature in Language Teaching Special Interest Group (LiLT SIG) and Tokyo JALT on 29th November 2020. Though the event was due to take place live in April, the spread of COVID-19 necessitated the rescheduling and change to an online format. The theme of the event was applying creative writing to the language classroom and the approaches of five speakers who effectively teach creative writing as a means of acquiring and producing the target language, which in each case was English.

This report will first briefly introduce creative writing as a pedagogy in itself and as a complement to the language classroom. It will then report on the talks of five speakers who apply creative writing pedagogy and practice to their second language (L2) classes. Their talks and workshops are summarized to provide practical solutions for any EFL teacher who wishes to include creative writing in their language classes.

Creative writing (henceforth referred to as CW) as an academic discipline is deeply established in the field of humanities, though it is comparatively underrepresented as a medium to enhance the language classroom. Recent arguments for its place in the ESL classroom have focused on its capacity to help learners appreciate English as a communicative tool. Although Maley (2009) recognizes the limits of the communicative approach to language teaching, he maintains that CW not only facilitates the acquisition and production of language-learning fundamentals such as grammar and vocabulary, but also encourages the learner to experiment with those forms. They can engage with language playfully, exploring its malleability and limitless possibilities to help them express themselves. In other words, CW can expand the boundaries of learner perception and pedagogical approaches of English communication.

Kelan (2014) argues that CW is essentially a Freirean pedagogy: dialogic and emancipatory, encouraging learners to explore their voice and identity

toward a transformative awareness of their non-L1 voice. However, with this limitless potential comes criticism that a free pedagogy constitutes an undisciplined pedagogical approach. Perhaps, as a result, CW is an underused approach in the Japanese EFL classroom. Maloney (2019) asserts that curricula bias toward “academic” modes of education and assessment may contribute to instructor reluctance to teach any form of creativity. Another argument to consider is teacher apprehension due to a lack of practical education in the area. Most universities in Japan require instructors to hold postgraduate certificates in TESOL or applied linguistics and rarely emphasise the benefits of interdisciplinary training. These TESOL programs very rarely provide opportunities to learn about the application of creativity in the classroom.

With these obstacles often resulting in language teachers in Japan rarely attempting CW activities in their classes, students are missing out on rich opportunities to explore the target language as well as their voice and identity.

The presentations are presented in the order they were given.

**“The Description of the Crocodile was Real Good:”  
How Stylistics can Facilitate Discussion in the  
Creative Writing Workshop, by Luke Draper**

Luke Draper is an associate lecturer of English at Kwansei Gakuin University, specializing in writing pedagogy and materials development. As well as working full-time as a lecturer, he is currently completing his Ph.D. on CW workshops and L2 language learning. The presentation title was taken from a participant at the University of Iowa’s Writers’ Workshop, famous for its notable alumni and colourful history. Weaving together the story of the Iowa CW workshop and his research interest in CW provided a valuable depth of perspective at the start of the day.

In the first part of his talk, Draper explored connections between stylistics and CW, as previously

researched by Scott (2013). Using examples from Simpson (2004) and Toolan (2013), he illustrated how excerpts from texts could be used to provide a setting for a story and help to allow for orientation to the next stages of CW. Raymond Carver's short story *Cathedral* was used as an example of this technique, focusing on the linguistic narrative choices in the text. The key to successful inspection and exploration of texts in this way is the use of techniques from the field of stylistics. By guiding students through a text to enable understanding of narrative features and lexical cohesion, workshopping with literature can enable meaningful interactions with the text and help empower students to write their own creative works.

Next, Draper moved on to his central question, that is, "How does Stylistics benefit the CW workshop in an L2 context?". The talk explored various facets of this question and gave some tentative answers which support the position that stylistics is a naturally effective way to enhance the CW workshop. One interesting and potentially divisive aspect of the CW workshop is the dialogic nature of verbal critique. Draper explained what this might mean in different teaching contexts, including with L2 learners. Traditional uses of workshopping techniques such as reading aloud what they have written should consider learners' willingness to accept such boundaries. Simultaneously, it may be wise for teachers to be flexible when working with the so-called "gag rule" (typically part of a CW workshop during which time participants listen silently to other participants critiquing their work). Participants in the session were particularly interested in this aspect of CW workshops, with questions in the Zoom chat asking for suggestions on how teacher feedback or student interactions may be effectively managed.

As for pedagogical implications, there were several emerging themes of interest for teachers in Japan interested in CW. Draper's particular focus was to discuss stylistics as a way of connecting CW with L2 learning. Stylistic analysis using deixis and syntax examination may be particularly useful for learners working with short forms of poetry in Japan, for example. He emphasised the need for the craft of CW to be "explicitly taught", which he explained means linguistic, stylistic and narratological metalanguage. Finally, Draper's summary provided concise guidance for practitioners wishing to implement creative writing activities for L2 language learning.

### **Reading to Write, Writing to Read, by Cristina Tat**

Cristina Tat delivered a presentation on the practical implementation of a CW curriculum. Referring to her current teaching context of the School of Policy Studies at Kwansai Gakuin University, she discussed the development of a special topics course that is part of a coordinated English program at the university level. This course makes use of extensive reading, based on Day and Bamford's (2002) tenets of extensive reading, especially, "... pleasure, information and general understanding".

Tat drew on her own childhood reading experiences for inspiration, and fondly recalled the joys of reading the colorful French comic book *Pif*. Reflecting on this experience, she realized the importance of aesthetics in reading. This point of view is supported by Kuzmicova (2013) who wrote of the "vicarious sensorimotor experiencing [of] mental imagery...a powerful source of aesthetic enjoyment in everyday life and, reportedly, one of the commonest things readers remember about literary narratives in the long term" (online abstract).

Students usually read from a selection of fiction books that she hand-picked for the course library. However, during emergency remote teaching (ERT) due to the pandemic, students were unable to borrow books from the university library, so they read books from Xreading, which has a slightly different makeup of titles. During each class period, students take part in Sustained Silent Reading (SSR), and Tat models the activity by reading alongside the students during this time. Instead of requiring students to take quizzes to show that they have read the books, they complete reading logs, participate in book discussions, and other engaging activities.

Students use the books they have read as models for elements of their own stories. They mine the text for examples of the creative writing techniques that they study in class. For instance, when students study how dialogue functions in stories, they look to the graded readers for concrete examples, and through this process of reading and noticing, they become more aware of the conventions of creative writing. Other areas of study include sensory imagery, dialogue, and character development.

In the writing portion of the course, students complete weekly writing assignments and write their own stories. Peer review sessions were conducted to provide feedback on stories written by students. She shared some examples of student comments from peer

reviews and mentioned that this activity became anonymous when conducted online due to ERT. This may have helped students to participate more frankly in discussions about their classmates' work.

In conclusion, Tat aims to use creative writing and extensive reading in tandem so that students can engage more meaningfully with texts and develop an interest in reading for pleasure.

### **Creative Writing in the Era of COVID-19 Pandemic by Atsushi Iida**

Atsushi Iida is an associate professor of English and the Chair of Foreign Language Education at Gunma University. His presentation explored various facets of how poetry writing in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching context has been a varied and different experience in 2020. It aimed to contextualise and reflect on issues arising from changes in the teaching situation and explore how the pandemic has impacted interactions with students writing poems in their English classes.

From a teacher-researcher perspective, Iida began by outlining the challenges 2020 has brought for students and teachers in teaching environments. Graduation ceremonies in March were cancelled, along with guidance sessions for new students. The most significant impact has been on first-year students, who were unable to participate in opening ceremonies. Instead of having the typical first-year experiences in class on campus, they spent their time learning online throughout the year. These reduced opportunities to make new friends led many students to report negative emotions and show signs of stress. For teachers, the situation has been different but has mirrored students' stressful experiences this year. Mixed feelings of guilt, frustration, and even fear may need to be carefully navigated by the creative writing teacher in these troubling times. With these things in mind, Iida discussed how L2 learning experiences in 2020 had been affected by the pandemic.

Iida utilizes a *meaningful literacy practice* approach (Hanauer, 2012), which he explained means to use writing activities in the language classroom to focus on the uniqueness of language learners: their experiences, language learner histories, and their social context. Activities such as autobiographical writing use the target language to express *voice*. He defines voice in his earlier work as "the articulation of [writers'] personal needs, interests, and ideas - in a social context that presumes an *audience* - the teachers, classmates, and even the

community at large" (Iida, 2010, p.28 quoted in Iida, 2020). Iida's continued interest and the focus of the talk was the central question of "How can we teach voice in L2 writing?"

The presentation utilised interactive discussions with participants joining breakout rooms to share perspectives on reading a poem written this year in response to the pandemic. In the latter part of the presentation, Iida illustrated how poetry writing works as meaningful L2 literacy practice through adapting his materials for the particular situation of 2020 (cancelled ceremonies, online learning, the wider societal impact of the pandemic). His course materials include activities to explore poetry and poetic writing, reflective writing, free writing, and translation activities (from L1 to L2). The final stage of writing poetry brings together all of these aspects.

The talk finished with some conclusions and future research areas for poetry writing in the Japanese EFL classroom. These points may be relevant to teachers working with different levels of language learners, not only university students. Iida's message was that poetry and L2 writing involves reflective practice and literacy practice, focusing on meaning construction.

Language learning contexts have always presented opportunities for emotional interactions, for example when learners write about their feelings. However, there has been something markedly different about exploring the pandemic with students while the pandemic is happening. Among the challenges of 2020 is the uncertainty that the news cycle and students' experiences may bring to the language classroom. Creative poetry writing has the potential to explore emotional topics in meaningful ways.

### **A Bit of a Character: Building Voice in Fiction with L2 students, by Iain Maloney**

The fourth speaker, Iain Maloney, is an author with three novels, a book of haiku and a memoir to his name, and also a lecturer at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies where he teaches CW. He delivered a workshop that focused on activities designed to stimulate characterization in fiction writing tasks.

Maloney began his talk by contextualizing his teaching practice: He teaches CW to third-year students as an elective course. He introduces the students to creative non-fiction and travel writing as a means of familiarizing them with the form of story-writing. He

then teaches scriptwriting, which introduces his students to dialogue, using activities such as listening to and transcribing peer discussion to recognize natural interaction. Next, he teaches poetry, which familiarizes the students with poetic devices such as metaphor, imagery, and meter. Finally, the three genres are synthesized in a fiction-writing task. The main difference between fiction and creative non-fiction, Maloney asserts, is that fiction requires student-writers to consider character and plot more resourcefully. While many creative writers tend to write in first-person and as themselves, Maloney explores different voices in his own creative writing and draws on this experience to encourage his students to experiment with characterization themselves.

Maloney demonstrated two activities he uses in class to activate his students' imagination in terms of character. The first activity was an open ethnographic survey about a character his students would create for a short story. The questions ranged from the character's name and their hobbies to their favorite flavor of ice cream and whether they like to visit museums. Students are encouraged to be creative with the answers and to not answer with information about themselves. Maloney stressed that much of the information from the survey may not be used in the final text, but that it helps the learner identify with the character they are creating by breaking the character down into constituent parts.

The second activity was a letter-writing task, in which student writers must write to themselves as their character. Maloney recommended this activity as it allows the student to explore the voice of the character they have created. It also forces the learner to write from the character's perspective as they are essentially writing a letter to themselves.

To help illustrate the importance of characterization in fiction writing, Maloney provided an anecdote about his own writing. He tried writing from the perspective of a sixteen-year-old female, but realized that in one scene, when the character is creating a mixtape of music for a party, the character's musical taste was similar to his own. This led to the realization that the character, though different in age and gender, was merely an extension of Maloney's personality. After using similar activities to the ones introduced in his talk, Maloney created the character to not like music at all and to play a generic pop compilation album at the party, an antithetical action to what the author would do. This not only encouraged Maloney to explore alternative voice and characterization to inform his writing, but to also

encourage his students to do the same. The two activities demonstrated in his talk provide a step-by-step approach to motivate students to also explore different characters and voices.

### **Creative Writing in the EFL Classroom, by Suzanne Kamata**

Suzanne Kamata is an award-winning author and associate professor at Naruto University of Education in Tokushima Prefecture. Some of her most recently published books are *Pop Flies*, *Robo-Pets*, and *Other Disasters* and *Indigo Girl*. She began her presentation by discussing educational goals, referring to objectives from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) that are relevant to creative writing: guidelines for "developing individuals' abilities, cultivating creativity, and fostering a spirit of autonomy and independence" (Basic Act on Education, 2006), and cultivating a "zest for life" (MEXT, 2008). She introduced various creative writing activities, including poems and mashups, and outlined methods to provide meaningful feedback to help students revise their work. At the end of the session, participants had the opportunity to try some of the activities and share their writing with the group.

Kamata introduced two kinds of poems that she has used in the classroom: cento and abecedarian. To write a cento poem, students choose lines from already published poetry and assemble these in fresh ways to create original poems (see Kamata, 2016). The second type of poem, the abecedarian poem is a "poetic form guided by alphabetical order" (American Academy of Poets, n.d.) with a long history. Such poems open with a word beginning with the letter a, continues to the second line with a word beginning with the letter b, and so on until the poem is finished. Kamata adapted the format to suit the particular needs of the EFL classroom by adding additional "rules" to the instructions, such as including a sentence fragment or a line longer than 100 words. This framework can be applied in poems, stories, or essays, and in this way, sentence variation and creative thinking can be applied across genres.

To create a mashup, writers take two different stories and combine them into one new, original story. Kamata provides students with a list of well-known titles from Eastern and Western literary traditions, and students choose one from each list. Stories that are likely to be familiar to Japanese students are folk tales like *Momotaro*, *Urashima Taro*, and *Kasa Jizo*, or modern series like *Detective Conan*, *Pokemon*, and *Anpanman*. These could

be paired with European fairy tales made famous through Disney movies, such as *Cinderella*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *The Little Mermaid*. Similar to the abecedarian poem, the mashup assignment requires students to use both creative thinking and language skills to compose their stories and share them with classmates, either as written texts or oral presentations.

As teachers and writers know, polished drafts do not appear on the first try, and Kamata reminded participants that “writing is revising.” Because of the importance of revision for experienced and novice writers alike, she offered practical suggestions for giving teacher feedback and eliciting peer feedback, such as giving comments, pointing out favorite words or phrases, and correcting grammar or spelling. Furthermore, teachers can ask specific questions to evoke students’ feelings about a piece of writing. For instance, in her experience, students tend to underwrite, so by asking classmates to answer the question “What do you want to know more about?” students will be more likely to give meaningful feedback to each other.

During a year of online teaching and social distancing, it was a welcome opportunity not only to listen to descriptions of classroom activities but also to write something for fun and connect with other participants during the workshop portion of the session. First drafts of abecedarian poems and innovative ideas for mashups were shared by reading aloud or via the text chat function on Zoom. Indeed, session participants experienced the potential of creative writing activities to cultivate the “zest for life”.

### **Concluding comments**

#### *Organising the online conference*

This event went ahead online after 18 months of planning and several changes in the proposed schedule. Kyoto JALT contacted the LiLT SIG in May 2019 with the aim of bringing together JALT speakers for a joint event with another Kyoto group, Writers in Kyoto (WiK). After some discussions with the Kyoto JALT committee, a place, format, and focus for the event began to take shape, although available dates for the event moved from 2019 to 2020 and settled on April 2020. WiK decided not to continue as co-hosts. However, officers from Kyoto JALT were in continuous communication about the event until early 2020, when COVID-19 began to affect in-person chapter events. Kyoto JALT initially offered to reschedule for an online event, but a suitable date was not confirmed. Later in the year, in discussion with Kyoto JALT, the LiLT SIG

decided to reschedule the event online and looked around for a chapter to host within the 2020 calendar year. Tokyo JALT was quick to reply to our inquiries and had a team ready to help organize the online event. We appreciate the support of Kyoto JALT in the planning stages and their continued correspondence through our change of plans. Kyoto JALT was also supportive of the change to Tokyo JALT as co-host.

Planned as an in-person event for April 2020, the move to the online format using Zoom for this CW event brought several benefits. Bringing together speakers from different parts of Japan has typically been one of the more challenging logistical aspects of event planning. Usually, it brings with it the expense of reimbursing travel for invited speakers. This event featured Suzanne Kamata in Shikoku, Iain Maloney in Gifu, Cristina Tat and Luke Draper in Kansai, and Atsushi Iida in Gunma. With online events in the future, speakers can also join from various parts of the country (or even from outside Japan, perhaps) without difficulty. The online format had some obvious advantages from the perspective of providing a more accessible experience for SIG JALT members. Speakers from smaller, countryside locations can join online events more easily, and JALT members from the more rural parts of the country have much to gain from this situation.

As well as logistics, the practical aspect of interaction during an online session seemed to suit the sessions’ creative topics. Online events can discuss a theme in close-up, something which may not be possible in co-hosted conferences or symposia. The online format seemed to facilitate immediate feedback for speakers and communication between participants and allowed for diverse opinions to be exchanged. There was little of what Draper described as a common criticism of writing workshops, that is their “crucifying silences” (Draper, 2020, quoting Gross, 2010, p.52). For CW in particular, the online format creates the opportunity for simultaneous interaction and participant responses during workshop-style talks and Q&A sessions. In the online CW event, the audience could connect in real time with other participants by writing questions, comments, and opinions in the Zoom chat creating a shared experience. Thus for facilitators, keeping up with the discussion questions and allowing participants to ask their questions directly became more important than in regular in-person events.

*Future directions for creative writing*

There are many future directions for future SIG events or activities that may include working with CW in various contexts. In a lively discussion at the end, in addition to those described by the speakers, suggestions included using Japanese literature in translation, working with learners to publish or share their work, and CW for faculty development. Finally, perhaps CW teaching can help more fully acknowledge and appreciate Japan's literary and linguistic context, including the L1 language backgrounds of diverse language learners in Japan.

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## Submission guidelines

*The Journal of Literature in Language Teaching*, the refereed research journal of the Literature in Language Teaching (LiLT) Special Interest Group, invites research articles, research reports on the use of literature and literary forms (eg creative writing) in language classrooms, as well as book reviews, practice-sharing and relevant conference reports. Although we have a focus on Japan- and broader Asia-based language education, we welcome submissions from international contexts based on applicability to the journal's readership. Further details can be found at <http://liltsg.org>

### Deadline for submissions:

April 30<sup>th</sup> for the Autumn issue

October 31<sup>st</sup> for the Spring issue

There are, broadly speaking, seven categories of article. Word limits provided here are guidelines, not rules, and do not include the bibliography in the count.

- 1) *Feature articles*, detailing in depth research, whether empirical or theoretical. These are generally between 2,500 to 4,000 words long.
- 2) *Literature in practice*, which describe the practical use of literature in the language classroom which teachers can readily apply. These are typically 2,000 to 3,000 words long. Although such articles detail classroom practice, it is preferred that they try to connect the practice to the academic literature in terms of why or how the practice helps educators and students.
- 3) *Reviews* of books pertinent to the field.
- 4) *Interviews*. These may be with members of the Special Interest Group detailing their research and practice, or prominent researchers/practitioners in the field.
- 5) *Conference reports* from literature-themed events and presentations.
- 6) *Presentation reports*. These are short write-ups of conference presentations given by the authors. They should be academic in tone and include references to the literature.
- 7) *Comments* on article previously published in the Journal.

We may also occasionally accept “My share” style activities describing original, effective activities for promoting literature.

Submissions should follow APA7 style, also known as the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 7th edition, particularly with regard to referencing. Submissions should be in carefully formatted MS Word, Pages or Libre Office, in Times New Roman size 12.

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