

Writing a Screenplay: Using Drama in the Classroom

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Quick Guide:

Keywords: Task Based Language Teaching, group projects, graded readers, intensive reading, CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning)

Learner English level: Intermediate to advanced (CEFR A2-C2)

Learner maturity level: Middle school to adult

Preparation time: NA

Activity time: 7-14 weeks

Materials: Graded reader(s)/literary text, handouts, Google documents, LINE

Activity Overview

The goal of a communication class is to increase students' ability across the five skills and the ability to respond to real-life situations. How many times can you teach someone how to introduce themselves or give directions before it becomes tedious? Oscar Wilde has been quoted as saying, "life imitates art more than art imitates life" (Wilde, 1905). Drawing on the rich literary history of the English language and the convenience of graded readers, you can create something much more memorable. Keeping this in mind, I will share a way to incorporate writing a screenplay into your classroom over either a 7-week and 14-week period.

Preparation

Choosing a text & creating materials

First, choose a graded reader/text that is suitable for your students' proficiency. Check the story for its length and that it has an appropriate amount of action. Look online at eltbooks.com,

<https://english-e-reader.net> (free), or at your local library. Choose multiple texts or a collection of short stories if the class is large.

Procedure

7 weeks

Groups

Make your class into groups of four or five. Assign each group a story or part of story to write.

Communication and editing

Use Google Docs so students can edit in real time while you keep track of their progress. Make LINE groups including yourself to help students communicate easily. A template is included in the appendices.

Consequence creators

Create comprehension questions for quizzes, and have students write a summary of the story. There is a *Story Map* handout that is included in the appendices that is very useful for students to understand the setting, characters, problems, plot/events, and make predictions about what will happen next.

Screenplay

The screenplay should be written with a narrator who tells the audience extraneous details and what action is going on in the story, and characters with different speaking roles. All action by the characters should be included as notes in the document. A sample scene has been included in the appendices.

Performance

Students will need time to rehearse and build sets (use chairs, desks, and the whiteboard). I gave students 20 minutes in class every week. If you are worried about students using their L1 during this time make a handout of useful phrases for code switching (Appendix D). The final performance is on the last day of normal classes.

14 Weeks

Expanded activities and scaffolds

Students should make vocabulary lists and do separate roleplays or improvisations of the characters. If you are using a longer text then I recommend assigning reading homework, and have in-class discussions if the material is deep enough.

Projects

Over the course of a semester have students make character profiles and give presentations about them. Leading up to the final performance have students make a radio drama (that is the same as the story or concerned with it) using audio recordings.

Conclusion

When using a literary text as your focus the possible activities you can create for it are only limited by your imagination. Using a literary text and having students write a screenplay allows students to not only learn realistic usage of language, but makes them put it into their own words. A variety of activities surrounding a literary text can help students improve in all of the skills.

References

Wilde, O., & Wilde, O. (1905). *Intentions*. Brentano's.

Donny Sparrow has been a teacher in Japan for 8 years now. He was an *eikaiwa* teacher first and then later moved on to ALT work at the elementary and middle school level. For the last 3 years, he has been a part of the staff at Kyoto Sangyo University. He is also the Publicity Chair of Kyoto JALT and has been active in the chapter for the past year and a half. He just recently joined the PIE SIG and is looking forward to being more active in it.



Appendix A

Google Doc Template

Class

Group #

Story:

Screenplay Pages (each student writes 2-3 pages)

Name	Page #

Comprehension Questions

1. The Speckled Band

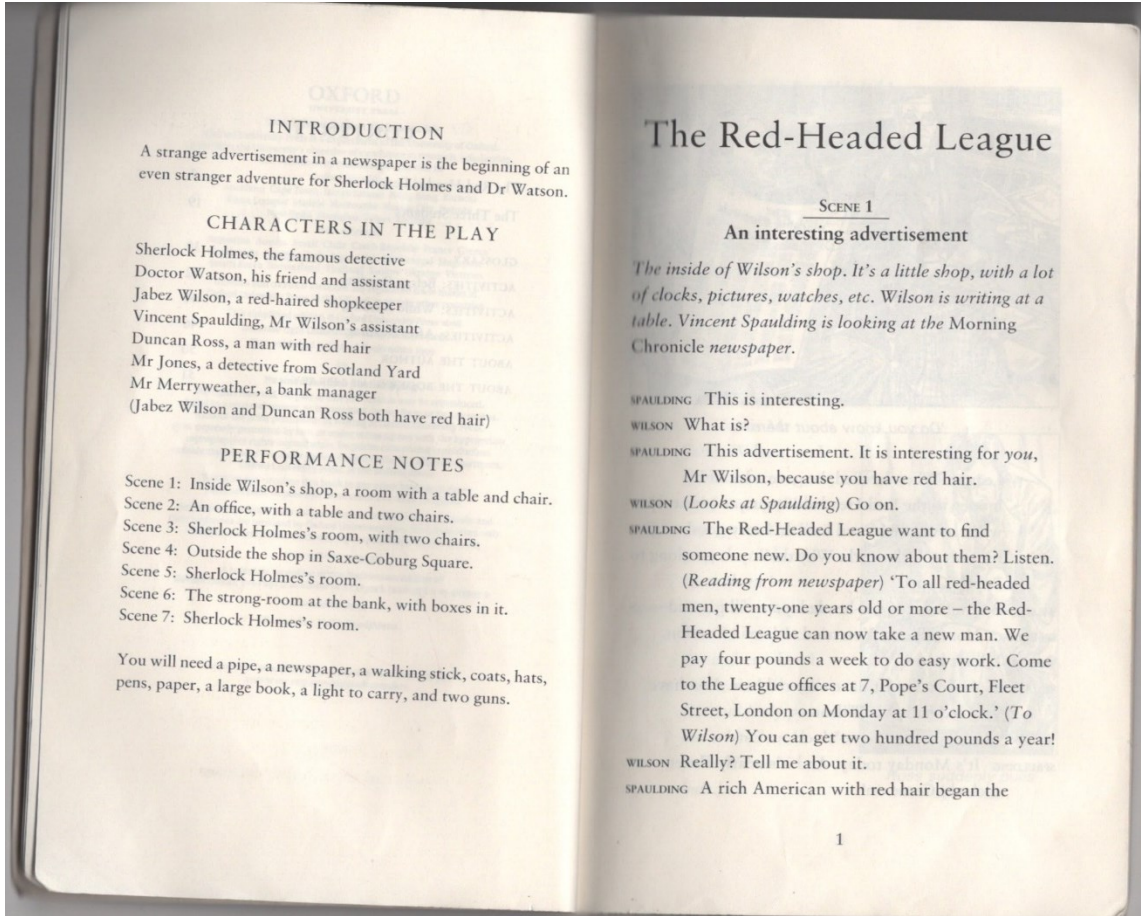
- At what age did Julia die? (Name)
 - Answer:
- What does Dr. Roylott have at the house that people are scared of? (Name)
 - Answer:
- What is the speckled band? Why did Dr. Roylott die? (Name)
 - Answer:

2. A Scandal in Bohemia

- Who is Count von Kramm really? (Name)
 - Answer:
- What does Irene Adler have that the King wants? (Name)
 - Answer:
- Did the King get what he wanted? Why or why not? (Name)
 - Answer:

3. The Five Orange Pips

- Where did Uncle Elias live when he was younger? (Name)
 - Answer:
- What does K.K.K. stand for? Why did they want to kill Uncle Elias? (Name)
 - Answer:
 - Did The Star get home to Georgia, USA? Why? Why not? (Name)
 - Answer:



Introduction

Characters in the Play

Performance Notes (Where is each scene? Who is in each scene?)

- Scene 1:
- Scene 2:
- Scene 3:
- Scene 4:
- Scene 5:
- Scene 6:
- Scene 7:

Start your screenplay below this line-----

Appendix B

Sample Screenplay Scene

The 5 Orange Pips

Scene 1: Holmes' House

(It's a rainy night and Watson and Sherlock Holmes are sitting around the fireplace while the storm rages outside)

Narrator: In the summer of 1887 Dr. Watson is visiting his friend Sherlock Holmes. It is a stormy night and they are sitting by the fire when suddenly there is a knock at the door

Watson: (looks at Holmes) Who can this be!?

Holmes: If he comes on business in this weather it's important. Come in! (Holmes calls out loudly)

Openshaw: (opens the door and comes inside, he looks very tired) I've come to ask for help...

End Scene

Appendix C

Story Map Hand Out

Group Name:

Member Names:

Date

Story Map 1

Write notes in each section.

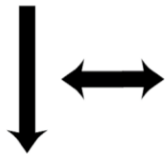
Setting: Time:



Characters:



Problem:



Plot/Events:

Prediction(s):

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Appendix D

Code Switching Hand-out Example Phrases

Group Work and Rehearsal Phrase Sheet

What do you think about...

- ○○について、どう思う？ (or 思いますか？ or お考えですか？)
- Could you please...
 - ～をしていただけますか？ (do+名詞)
 - ～ていただけますか？ (動詞)
 - ～してもらえますか？
- How about...
 - ～はどうですか？
 - ～はどう？
- How do I say _____ in English?
 - 英語で～～って、どう言うの？
 - 英語で～～とは、どう言うのですか？
 - ～って、英語で何て言うの？
- What does _____ mean in Japanese?
 - ～～は日本語でどういう意味？
- What do you mean?
 - どういう意味ですか？
 - どういうこと？
- I think...
 - 私は～～だと思う
 - ～～だと、私は思う