

Writing Short Stories and Novels as Part of Classroom Activity - Introductory Discussion

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Learning English: Greater Attention to Practical/Economic Needs

There is great increase in the number of students choosing to study English as their major subject in Colleges and Universities. Employment possibilities look brighter for those who do well in English. Mastery of English language skills is greatly appreciated in almost every field.

Less Interest in Developing Skills for Writing Creative Works

While the day to day practical aspects of English skills have received good recognition, both students and teachers of English have not shown great interest in writing creative works in English.

Indian Writing in English has become a keenly studied subject, especially at the M.Phil. and Ph.D. levels. Yet, students and teachers, in general, do not seem to show much interest in writing creative works in English.

Syllabus Emphasis

Syllabuses followed in English classes, both in schools and colleges/universities, give due emphasis on composition and free writing. Yet, writing is more focused on forms of communication to meet academic and business needs, etc. It is also important that we encourage our students and teachers to get involved in writing original creative works in English.

Great Attention to Diaspora Writing, Subaltern Studies, etc. in Research Activities

Diaspora writing is very popular and impressive. However, with emphasis on diaspora writing, we lose the opportunity to help our students and teachers to write their own original

creative pieces/writings of literature. They can easily focus on aspects of characters, episodes, living beings, social and economic issues, etc. we face in India itself.

Closer home we have a great model in Meena Kandasamy, who became famous even as a young person, through her awesome creative works in English. Consider her novels, these sound very serious and deal with important issues. Some students may be attracted by Meena Kandasamy's novels, and others may be impressed by the other leading novelists from within India and abroad.

Research on Published Materials

It is good to see that our research scholars and teachers of English continue to show great interest in original English literature written by native speakers of English from all native English-speaking countries, apart from translations of world literature in English from around the world. Topics chosen for research at the post-graduate and doctoral levels confirm this trend. For example, a recently published insightful article "Glimpses of Doctoral Research in English Studies in India: A Study of Institute of Advanced Studies in English, Pune by Ravindra B. Tasildar (2019), describes the ongoing trend in teaching and research at the doctoral level studies in the well-known Institute of Advanced Studies in English, Pune in the Savitribai Phule Pune University.

Another interesting trend is to devote attention to Subaltern Literature written in English from all around the world, including Indian Writing in English. Consider the electronic volumes published by the Department of English, Annamalai University based on their seminar on Subaltern Literature: *Indian Writing in English: A Subaltern Perspective* (<http://languageinindia.com/march2018/indiansubalternperspective.html>) and *Black Writings: A Subaltern Perspective* (<http://languageinindia.com/march2018/blackwritingssubalternperspective.html>) edited by Dr. T. Deivasigamani.

In addition, articles published in journals indicate that the teachers are keen to make use of electronic classroom materials and other available resources to improve classroom teaching and test/examination models. These are all great strengths of teaching English at the college/university levels.

Some Advantages of Writing Creative Works in English – Greater Focus on ...

Since English is becoming more popular all around the world, writing in English will help our students and teachers to present their creative works without resorting to translation across ethnic and linguistic groups. (Remember there are certain constraints relating to how cultural items are expressed in creative writing. Great writers like Rabindranath Tagore, R. K. Narayan, and Mulk Raj Anand, to mention a few, also faced this constraint, but they did overcome this constraint! We will discuss this and other issues in our later articles.)

Let the composition class enable our students and teachers to focus also on writing anecdotes, short stories, and short novels. Let the teachers take the initiative to give ideas, suggestions, episodes, etc. Let the teachers take the initiative to identify possible themes and events that match the experience and levels of language competence of the students in their classes. Let the teachers also enrich their own reading interests and their language competence even as they develop insight into the structure and organization of a novel, or a short story, etc.

Sources the Students and Teachers Can Use

Personal experience may be a good beginning to narrate a story. This element is applicable to all age groups and may be more easily adopted by all age groups.

What happens around oneself is another great source. This does require some sympathetic and/or keen observation skills.

More often than not, secondary sources offer many stories. For example, we may be able to get dozens of stories from our daily newspapers every day! Actually, we would highly recommend this source to our undergraduate and post-graduate students. Such stories offer not only events but also a variety of characters, social norms, individual motives of participant characters, etc.

Place of Imagination

To begin with, imagination may be a somewhat difficult process, but some discussions with the teacher and the classmates could lead to a variety of extension of an event or news item, etc.

We are all endowed with imagination as a skill. We as children might have earnestly desired some toy or some such thing and then might have imagined in our thinking that we got it. In so many ways, we all imagine things even in adult life, but to put these imaginations in words and then put these in writing are not done by all.

Overcoming Shyness, Reluctance, and Procrastination

Our reluctance to put our thinking and imagination in writing must be overcome through several processes, in particular with the help of our teachers in our classrooms. Perhaps telling the story in simple English to an audience of our classmates would be a good beginning.

Unfortunately, many of our students from rural, non-urban and socially and economically backward groups even in urban areas are still reluctant to speak in English even in their classrooms. To a certain extent, teachers of English are no exception to this trend. At the same time, we believe, shyness and reluctance can be overcome if they are encouraged to use the medium of writing.

First Generation Learners and College-goers

Our classrooms in undergraduate and postgraduate classes have many first-generation college goers. Their dependence on their mother tongue in the classroom could be an obstacle to develop their speaking and listening skills in English. Yet, such dependence on mother tongue is a constructive element in enabling them to imagine stories around them with characters, events and motives which have not found adequate room in the short stories and novels written by many Indian writers in English.

Recognizing and Identifying the Structure

In our classrooms, do we really sharpen the critical skills of identifying the structure that underlies a short story or a novel? Is there any room for it with our focus on grammatical correctness of sentences spoken and written?

At the postgraduate level, there is some analysis of the characters found in the novel they are required to study. Often students and teachers seem to focus on narrating the story of the novel under study as the major focus of their article. How do we, or can we, use this process to initiate imagining new stories and new forms of storytelling, etc.?

Role of Reading

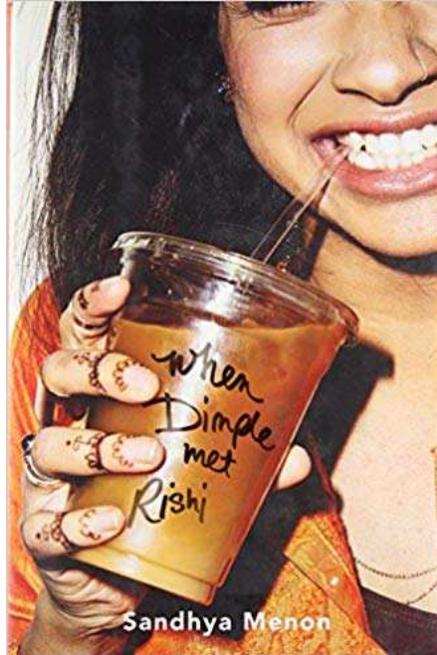
What is the role of reading a short story or a novel in developing our ability and skill in writing a short story or a novel on our own? We don't want our students to become copycats. But is it also ever fully possible not to get impacted or influenced by the stories we read? How do we escape from being a copycat while composing our own short stories and novels? Will conscious effort help?

Place and Impact of Literary Trends

How about joining the literary trends of the period and the society we live in? Some formats of novels or short stories could dominate a particular period in the literary history of any language. Young students who want to write their own short stories may unavoidably imitate a leading author's style or even the choice of characters, etc.

Detective novels were very popular, and they could still be in great demand. Many friends of ours in our school and college days imitated or adopted, or even adapted, the leading detective fiction stories and writers. Romantic novels were also written based on what these young friends read.

An interesting recent example for romantic novels for young people is the series of novels written by Sandhya Menon, a diasporic writer who lives in Colorado, USA.



Courtesy: <https://www.amazon.com/When-Dimple-Rishi-Sandhya-Menon/dp/1481478680>

Many journals have reviewed this novel favourably. The following quotes are taken from https://www.amazon.com/When-Dimple-Rishi-Sandhya-Menon/dp/1481478680/ref=sr_1_3?crid=1A3O41PFDJY0&keywords=sandhya+menon&qid=1565914701&s=books&sprefix=Sandhya%2Caps%2C217&sr=1-3

"Heartwarming, empathetic, and often hilarious--a delightful read." -- Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

"The strength of the story comes from its blending of Indian culture and values into a modern-day romance that scores of readers can enjoy. VERDICT A strong choice for any young adult collection." --School Library Journal

"The arranged marriage YA rom-com we've been waiting for." --Bustle Magazine

"This book is a hug you can carry, but it's also a smart exploration of how hard it can be to hold onto who you are and what you want if you dare to let someone else in." -- Barnes and Noble Teen Book Blog

Many novels in Indian languages in the past, as well as the present, can be grouped under romantic novels. Many novels deal with family life, family problems, and issues relating to widows, and so on, in a descriptive manner, without explicitly giving out their ideology.

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Let us give freedom to our students to choose their own theme, form, and length of the novel, in addition to how they would like to narrate the story. Over the years, they will settle down with their own mode of narrating the story, developing their characters, themes, and so on. What is needed now is to encourage them to write their own short stories and short novels. We will discuss the elements of forms, styles, characterization, choice of themes, etc. in subsequent articles.

Avoiding Copying and Plagiarism

Which one is real copying, and which one is simple acceptance of some of the elements of a story or a novel? While imitating a story may be an easy technique for a young student to begin writing his or her own first few stories, even as a technique of learning how to write a story in the classroom, we need to get our students from someone else's boat to their own boat to begin their lonely journey in positive terms.

To Conclude

We would like to discuss various issues and strategies of short story and novel writing in these pages. Our goal is to help our teachers to develop their own interest in writing creative literature even as they impart these skills to their students.

Learning the techniques of writing short stories and novels would indeed sharpen their literary sensitivity and appreciation. Even if one is interested in making it as their career and a source of income, they can certainly achieve their goal through the acquisition of appropriate skills.

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