

## The Use of Short Fiction in a Writing Class: Pedagogical Suggestions for Secondary Level Teachers in EFL Settings

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Literature has been repeatedly recognized as an effective source of authentic materials in EFL classrooms. Literature exposes learners to coherent and expert writing which can enable them to write better and facilitates students' creative writing skills. The purpose of this study was to investigate the teaching procedures of using short fiction in a Korean high school EFL course in which English writing and reading skills are integrated and to provide pedagogical suggestions for using authentic literature in EFL classrooms. First, this paper introduces a theoretical discussion of the advantages of using short fiction in an English writing instruction, and discusses reasons for selecting the Korean short novel *Dongbackkot* and the English short story "Araby" as resources for writing. After that pedagogical steps with practical classroom activities are described. We hope that the pedagogical suggestions provided here may inspire English teachers to design their teaching materials using appropriate literary texts to improve their students' English essay writing and balanced communication skills.

**Key words:** literature, short fiction, EFL writing instruction, compare and contrast essay writing, communication skills

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

EFL learners often associate English writing with repetitive drills carried out for the sake of practice and rote memorization in the controlled writing exercises common in EFL contexts, which are focused on establishing grammatical patterns, punctuation, and spelling. Thus, they rarely see a need or purpose for their writing (Chen, 2006) or experience L2 writing as a way to develop critical thinking and creativity (Gwin, 1990; Oster, 1989), which should be a vital part of education (Anderson, 1965; Sotto, 1994). How then can we change such low expectations of writing and provide students with experiences that motivate them to actively engage in the learning process? To create a positive learning environment in which students could experience writing as a means for expressing their thoughts, we incorporated literature into a Korean high school EFL writing class using a Korean novel, *Dongbackkot (The Camellias)* by Yu-jeong Kim and an English short story, “Araby,” by James Joyce.

Literature has often been recognized as an effective source of authentic materials in foreign language learning, which can help students expand their vocabulary and structural knowledge of English texts (Duff & Maley, 1990; Lazar, 1994; Marckwardt, 1981; McKay, 2001). Lazar (1994) stressed the motivational value of authentic literature, given the universal human interest in stories. Duff and Maley (1990) emphasized the role of literature in broadening students’ understanding of other cultures. As Marckwardt (1981) pointed out, since early childhood, students have experienced reading stories in their own language and so have background knowledge to transfer into reading English stories at appropriate language levels. Despite the positive effects of using literary texts on foreign language learning, however, high school English teachers may face challenges in their efforts to integrate literature into their writing instruction. Moreover, most recent studies have been conducted at the college level (Kim, 2013; Kim & Chung, 2016; Park, 2011). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the use of short fiction in a Korean high school EFL course, in which English writing is integrated with reading and supported by the students’ native language in a holistic approach to language learning. The lesson plan was created by the researchers on writing a compare and contrast essay with *Dongbackkot* and “Araby”.

We started to create a lesson plan for this writing class using literature with an assumption that it would serve a variety of pedagogical purposes, including motivating students (Whang, 2008), stimulating creative thinking and creativity (Kim, 2014; Lazare, 1987; Schmit, 2002), and raising cross-cultural awareness by combining authentic texts and student-centered classroom activities. Creativity, a very important concept in education, represents the production of something unique, exceptional and original (Anderson, 1965). Writing has the potential to involve creativity, imagination, interaction, emotion, and

attributes that can be used to develop powerful learning strategies (Emig, 1977).

Our assumption was that explicitly linking literary works with students' writing could help them improve not only their linguistic knowledge but also their creativity. Affirming that literature helps students to write creatively, Oster (1989) argues that instructors can design a variety of creative writing activities to help students to develop their writing skills. Narramore (1992) also points out the crucial role of the teacher in improving creativity in the classroom. Bastrukmen and Lewis (2002) state that because creative writing is associated with self-expression, the flow of ideas, meeting readers' expectations, and enjoyment of writing, it encourages students to express themselves freely and with confidence. They also argue that the ability to express ideas clearly developed by engaging in literary writing, characterized by imagination, plot development, and audience interaction, can be carried into academic writing.

In general, English teachers in EFL contexts have tended to use English short stories only as a means for acquiring English vocabulary and key expressions (Stern, 2001) and have hesitated to have students interact with literary works as a basis for writing essays in English, due largely to lack of effective guidelines for such practices. Moreover, many believe that literature-based instruction in an EFL writing course is too challenging for adolescent learners. Authentic works, however, can be found at about the same level of difficulty as the vocabulary and structural complexity of many assigned text materials in Korean high schools and the Korean SAT. Therefore, English literature can be found that is accessible to Korean high school students at all levels and usable as sources for writing as long as teachers offer step-by-step guidelines. In other words, it is a matter of "how," not "whether or not," to teach using literature.

Good writing involves the ability to express ideas clearly and confidently, which presents challenges to many language learners are weak in (Basturkmen & Lewis, 2002), but students must first be encouraged to have ideas to express, for which they need sources to stimulate their critical thinking, imagination, and creativity. As creativity is associated with higher order cognitive skills (Sotto, 1994), it is an important component of language learning, supporting the use of literature in writing instruction (Oster, 1989). In this study, therefore, we provide pedagogical suggestions for using authentic literature in EFL classrooms by describing the practical teaching procedures with classroom activities in a Korean high school English class.

## **2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **2.1. L2 Reading-Writing Integration**

Many scholars have argued that reading and writing skills in combination are critical for

academic success (Hale et al., 2001). However, because reading and writing are usually taught as separate skills in L2 settings, students have few opportunities to develop productive reading/writing connections (Hedgcock & Atkinson, 1993; Leki & Carson, 1994). Hence, learning to write from textual sources is often a challenge for ESL/EFL students (Grabe & Zhang, 2013). Literature can help students meet this challenge by presenting authentic language input and stimulating students to share, discuss, and write their ideas (Belcher & Hirvela, 2001). This input (reading)-to-output (writing) approach utilizing literature also exposes students to stylistic and rhetorical writing conventions (Weber-Fève, 2009).

In the past, while literary texts were widely used in language instruction, students were given no opportunities to use literature to express their own thoughts. It was assumed that merely appreciating literary works would help them to understand the activity of writing. For example, Spack (1985) argued reading literature could help students improve their writing abilities. Oster (1989) asserted that literature exposes the learners to coherent and expert writing which in fact helps students write better. However, more recently Stern (2001) has insisted that literature can be a rich and inspiring source as subject matter for writing as well as a language model. Literature as a model may result in students' writing that imitates the content, theme, organization or style of the texts they read. Literature as a subject matter, on the other hand, may encourage students to demonstrate original thinking, as they analyze and interpret the literary works they read. Also, reading and responding to literary texts by different authors introduce learners to different writing styles, which can encourage them to develop their own writing styles. Elliott (1990) argued that because literature provides an incomparably rich source of authentic material over a wide range of registers, students can internalize various usages of the target language and learn how messages are structured in different genres, including essay writing. Also advanced language learners need reading materials with a high motivational value in order to make significant progress. Literary texts by different authors demonstrate different writing styles, which can encourage learners to develop their own writing styles rather than emulate particular models. Developing such personal ownership of their writing is important for EFL learners, who often hesitate to express their opinions orally in class. Writing provides an alternative avenue for developing their own authentic voices and ideas (Gwin, 1990).

## 2.2. Benefits of Using Short Fiction in the EFL Classroom

There are many controversies surrounding the use of literature in language teaching (McKay, 1982, 2001; Savvidou, 2004). One of the factors that make teachers hesitate to use literature in EFL classroom is the length of some texts, particularly novels in the target language, which learners may find excessively time consuming. In this respect, among

various literary genres such as poetry, novels, and dramas, short fiction in the target language can be ideal for EFL learners because of its many options in terms of length and language levels, making it possible to match readability with students' proficiency. Collie and Slater (1991) have pointed out four advantages of using short stories for language teachers. First, short stories are practical because they can be taught within a few class sessions while holding students' interest. Also, short stories do not always require teachers' support; because as noted they can be intrinsically motivating, with well-organized tasks, students can work with on their own with the minimum guidance. The quick development of a short plot can keep students engaged in the action (Collie & Slater, 1991) and motivated to follow the interactions among the characters in a story (Marckwardt, 1981). In addition, short stories provide a wide selection from which to find texts that meet students' interests and language levels (Kang & Park, 2012). Finally, short stories have universal appeal and can be used to teach all four language skills to with all proficiency levels from beginning to advanced and all ages from children to adult learners. Learners at intermediate levels of proficiency could progress by interacting with short stories of high literary quality as long as they are selected and utilized appropriately in the teaching-learning context (Murdoch, 2002).

Therefore, to select appropriate literary texts, it is necessary for teachers to carefully consider their criteria such as students' language proficiencies and the cultural background knowledge needed to understand them (Collie & Slater, 1991). First, it is advisable to choose texts which are not so far beyond the students' current reading proficiencies that students are discouraged (Carter & Long, 1991) but not so easy as to be demotivating. In addition, because a text should deal with events or experiences with which readers are familiar or to which they can relate (Hill, 1992), the teacher should take the background knowledge of the readers into account (Carter & Long, 1991). In short, the teacher should select literary texts with settings and cultural content that are meaningful to students and can motivate them to want to read it. Accordingly two short fictional works, *Dongbackkot* and "Araby" were selected as both accessible and salient to issues of vital interest to adolescents.

### 3. INSTRUCTIONAL SETTINGS

This section provides a short description of the research context and explication of the reasons why the Korean novel *Dongbackkot* and the English short story "Araby" were considered appropriate as resources to improve students' creativity while writing in English.

### 3.1. A Short Description of the Syllabus

The syllabus for the writing course covers L2 writing processes, such as composing five-paragraph and comparison/contrast essays, to help L2 learners gain structural knowledge of English writing conventions. It is important to teach these features of English writing to Korean students so that they could understand how English texts are organized and how the speakers of English generally structure their arguments. This writing course was initially planned to lead students systematically through the stages of the writing process so that they could build confidence in expressing their thoughts and opinions in English. Therefore, the syllabus particularly emphasizes writing formats, coherence between main points and supporting details, “head-first” organization, repeated reference to the main argument throughout the writing, and other rhetorical strategies that may be familiar to native speakers of English but very new to language learners.

The target learners are Korean high school students with intermediate to advanced level English proficiency. Table 1 summarizes the eight steps of the writing unit. It should be noted that teachers can flexibly adapt the syllabus to contextual factors, such students’ English levels, school curriculum, and time constraints.

### 3.2. Selecting Two Works of Fiction: “Araby” and *Dongbackkot* (*The Camellias*)

The decision to use two works of fiction, a Korean novel and an English short story, as a basis for writing, rather than simply assigning them a topic, was made to encourage students’ creativity and critical thinking. Given their examination-oriented educational environment, Korean students tend to memorize material or copy specific models to ensure they get right answers. Comparing and contrasting two works of fiction from their own perspectives, it was believed, would encourage them to think creatively and to write what they thought focusing on the content rather than on correctness of form and grammar. The cross-language and cross-cultural comparison would also encourage use of their native language to support writing in the target language and direct them away from concern only about the mechanics of writing.

We started with the premise that students had read the English short story “Araby” and the Korean novel *Dongbackkot* in their previous semester. Thus, we thought they might be familiar enough with the two works to be ready to write an English essay based on them. Among the various types of English essays, a comparison and contrast essay was selected as appropriate for the students’ English level and a useful type to learn for further academic writing, and because it would support reliable and valid language assessment. Therefore, the two previously studied works of fiction, one in the students’ native language and one in

**TABLE 1**  
**A Brief Summary of Instructional Procedures**

Step	Learning Objectives	Classroom Activities
1	To examine the different rhetorical patterns of the L1 and L2 texts	The teacher (T) introduces the rhetorical features of the L1 and L2 texts. Students (Ss) compare and discuss the rhetorical features of the two texts
2	To understand the structure of a basic five-paragraph essay	T introduces each component of the essay with examples. Ss are exposed to five types of essay writing
3	To explore the structure of a compare/contrast essay	T guides students to observe and discuss the components of a compare/contrast essay Ss express their ideas by filling in a Venn diagram
4	To understand two patterns: block and alternating arrangement	T helps Ss understand the differences of the two patterns. Ss analyze a sample essay comparing two topics with the help of the teacher.
5	To get used to the four stages in essay writing	T guides Ss in completing a writing exercise following the four-stage procedure. Ss follow the teacher's instructions and write a sample essay.
6	To brainstorm what they will write about	T activates Ss' background knowledge about the two short fiction works. Ss work in groups with teacher's guidance.
7	To write a compare/contrast essay about the two short works of fiction	Ss generate ideas for writing in groups. Ss write an essay with two fictions individually in class.
8	To understand the importance of process in writing by incorporating feedback on the draft	T provides feedback and encourages Ss to reflect on their writing. Ss improve their writing through sharing, reflection, and assessment.

their target language, serve as materials to support learning to write a comparison/contrast essay in English as well as how to read analytically and critically and, most importantly, enjoy the works as literature.

"Araby," a short story by James Joyce published in his 1914 collection, *The Dubliners*, is about an Irish boy's obsession with the girl living across the street. Among the many themes common to Joyce in general and *Dubliners* in particular, the main theme in "Araby" is the boy's discovery of the discrepancy between the real and the ideal in life during his emotional journey from romanticized first love to disillusion and despair. The story is considered a useful resource for high school EFL students because it is written in fairly simple language and a straightforward style, so if the teacher provides vocabulary support in advance, it can be read by all students without great difficulty. Also, the poetic language describing the protagonist's perceptions and feelings provides a model for expressive writing. Second, the main theme of first love and the disappointment of having

romantic illusions extinguished by reality is one to which most adolescents can relate. Therefore, this study helps learners meditate on the meaning of love, what distinguishes adulthood from childhood, and what it means to “grow.” Third, the setting of the study offers students opportunities to learn about western culture, in this case, background knowledge about Ireland and Irish-British relationships in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Considering Korea’s colonial history and independence movement around in the early 1900s, students may be interested in the background of the novel and draw on knowledge of their own history to think critically about the various forms of imperialism at that time.

*Dongbackkot*, a famous Korean novel written by Yu-jeong Kim in the 1930s, is about the first love between the narrator, a lower class boy, and a higher class girl, Jeomsun. The tone is quite direct and humorous as Jeomsun is capable of showing her interest only through aggression. The young love is complicated by the fact that Jeomsun is the narrator’s social superior, which causes him to see Jeomsun’s aggression as a form of class warfare. The story ends happily, with the narrator crawling symbolically toward a greater destiny. *Dongbackkot* playfully depicts romantic love as a feature of Korean culture at the time. This Korean novel is effective for students to compare and contrast with the English short story in several ways. First, the topic of both, “first love,” the most commonly shared topic among adolescents, is compelling enough to motivate their interest in reading. Second, all high school students in Korea study *Dongbackkot* in the Korean literature course as the novel is considered one of the essential literary works to include in the national curriculum and literature textbooks. Moreover, other than the topic of young love, there are many aspects to be compared and contrasted, such as settings, characters, time frames, plots, and points of view, through which students could acquire critical thinking as well as English language skills. In the next section, we describe the several pedagogical steps used to students through this writing process.

#### **4. PEDAGOGICAL STEPS**

The final section provides practical suggestions for EFL teachers to carry out activities using an English short story along with a Korean novel to enhance, intercultural awareness and creativity as well as language learning. This writing course consists of eight stages for one semester and students are introduced to some basic concepts of English essay writing and the block structure of a comparison/contrast essay. They are then guided through the process of writing such an essay drawing on their prior knowledge of the two works to be compared. The eight stages of essay writing (Table 1) are adapted to the purpose of this study and can be used in other EFL classrooms.

#### 4.1. Step 1: Differences in L1 and L2 Essay Writing

Understanding English essay structure is a key to learning this genre, and structure can be broken down into its main components: introduction, body, and conclusion. Thus it is essential to teach these components, which form the overall organization of the essay and define sections for sentence-level writing. Therefore, before setting out to analyze two short stories, some background information on the English essay structure can be introduced to students to help them understand how writing in English is different from writing in Korean (Ferris, 1994; Kang & Oh, 2011).

At this stage, teachers can implement the following four processes in the classroom. First, the teacher should ask questions to check the students' background knowledge about English essay writing, which usually has a straightforward, logical structure that can be outlined before the writer begins a rough draft. The teacher highlights the differences between the Korean indirect style of writing, which leaves room for readers to fill in meaning themselves, and the English direct style, which focuses on explicitly delivering a clear message. The teacher can show the main features of English essay writing with visual aids such as PowerPoint slides or a summary handout that can serve as a reference. To check their understanding, the teacher can give the students two essays, one directly translated into English from Korean, and the other originally written in English, so students can analyze the stylistic and structural differences and discuss these with their classmates. In this process, students can freely generate and share their ideas, which will help them examine and compare the general principles of Korean and English writing as manifested in actual texts. After these inductive learning activities, the teacher explicitly explains about the differences between L1 and L2 essay structures. Lastly, the teacher encourages the students to apply their findings to their own English essay writing later in the course.

#### 4.2. Step 2: A Five-Paragraph Essay Outline

A basic English essay is typically structured to have an informative introduction, a body of about three main points developed in separate paragraphs, and a strong conclusion. The teacher conducts classroom activities and discussion to confirm students' understanding of each part of the five-paragraph essay, which provides the foundation for composing a comparison/contrast essay structure, which will be introduced at the next stage. The teacher then elaborates on the characteristics and roles of the introduction, main body and conclusion. In this stage it is particularly important to provide clear explanation of how to write a thesis statement as Korean students often struggle with developing arguments. The main body comprises paragraphs, which should focus on one idea each, in support of the position taken in the thesis statement. For the conclusion, the last sentence is the most

important, as it is the last line left in the reader's mind. Therefore, the teacher should emphasize that the conclusion should echo the introduction but also provoke a new idea that wraps up the essay as a whole and is the logical outcome of the argument developed in the preceding paragraphs. At this stage, five major types of essay writing can be introduced to the students: expository, descriptive, narrative, comparison/contrast, and persuasive or argumentative writing. As the main focus of this course is on writing a comparison/contrast essay, the others should be explained only briefly. The format of the comparison/contrast essay should then be reviewed and students reminded of the three main components of the structure mentioned earlier.

### 4.3. Step 3: Structure of a Compare and Contrast Essay and Brainstorming Ideas

The majority of class time is spent explaining structure of a five-paragraph compare and contrast essay with a simple example suggested by the teacher. Considering our previous experiences, our students will be highly likely to encounter many different kinds of writing assignments at college. One of the most useful essay types for introducing academic writing is the comparison/contrast essay, in which students focus on the ways in which certain items or ideas—usually two of them—are similar to (this is the comparison) and/or different from (this is the contrast) one another. Teaching such essays to the students encourages them to make connections between texts or ideas, engage in critical thinking, and go beyond mere description or summary to generate interesting analysis. When they reflect on similarities and differences, they gain a deeper understanding of the items they are comparing, their relationship to each other, and what is most important about them. In this stage, the teacher comes up with a simple classroom activity to compare and contrast two objects which have both commonalities and distinctive differences to demonstrate how students can develop their ideas when writing an essay. For example, the teacher lets students find similarities and differences between *Teacher A* and *Teacher B*. As all of the students already know the two teachers, their interest is aroused, and it is easy to compare and contrast the two familiar individuals.

As another exercise before setting out to do an essay writing task, students can practice once again with a topic designated by the teacher (e.g., “going to the beach” vs. “going to the mountains”). The teacher helps students understand the conceptual differences between comparison and contrast of the two topics by using a Venn diagram or making a chart that can help students efficiently identify the similarities (comparison) and the differences (contrast) between two or more objects or ideas. Learners at all age levels can benefit from compare/contrast graphic organizers and visual representations, such as the Venn diagram and comparison tables (Bulgren & Lenz, 1996; Ellis, 1996) to understand the relationship

between two or more topics the practices related to a subject. To make a Venn diagram, the teacher draws overlapping circles, one circle for each item being considered. In the central area where they overlap, the teacher lets students list the traits the two items have in common, which is the basis for comparison. The students are free to express their ideas with evidence and logically explain their thoughts with the help of the teacher. In each of the areas that do not overlap, the teacher lists the traits that are unique to that item, which is the basis for contrast. In this process, some students may need help filling in the sections so as to illustrate the similarities and differences.

#### 4.4. Step 4: Two Types of Writing: Block and Alternating Arrangement

With the teacher's guidance, the students practice this kind of analysis until they can relate it to the structure of a comparison/contrast English essay. When they have become familiar with the concept of comparison and contrast, the teacher introduces two main patterns: "Block Arrangement" (in which object A and object B are each described in a separate paragraph and then compared/contrasted) and "Alternating Arrangement" (in which the two items are compared/contrasted point by point within separate paragraphs), with essay examples of each. With either pattern, the teacher should make sure the students understand that every statement about the object A paragraph must have a corresponding statement about object B paragraph. In this stage, the teacher should confirm that the students clearly understand the two types of arrangement.

As a follow-up activity, students are asked to which pattern is used in each of ten excerpts illustrating mixed block with alternating styles. The teacher may then choose either writing pattern for students to use in their essays but must make sure to stick with it and not confuse students. In order to guide the students to use a block arrangement, as was the case in this study, the teacher gives the students an illustrative sample essay in which two topics (e.g., "backpacking" and "staying in hotels") are described in separate paragraphs, making sure the students understand that each statement in one paragraph has a corresponding statement in the other. The teacher can divide the students into group of four in which they analyze each paragraph of the essay with the help of a rubric they given with the essay, first finding the thesis statement in the introduction and then matching each section of the rubric to the portions of the essay.

#### 4.5. Step 5: Writing Exercise with a Step-By-Step Process

Class time is also devoted to writing practice, in which students can practice the points they have learned so. The teacher first guides the students through the whole process of writing an essay on an assigned topic. This activity serves as the final check of their

understanding of the block arrangement of a comparison/contrast essay before they compare and contrast the two works of fiction, which is the ultimate goal of this writing course. After this preliminary writing activity, the teacher guides them with the following four-step process.

First, the teacher leads the students in brainstorming activities with topics related to the literary works that are of interest to them, such as “being in a relationship vs. being single.” The teacher should make sure that students feel free to contribute any ideas without concern for their relevance, as the purpose is for them to generate many ideas as resources for their comparison/contrast essays and to broaden their thinking. Brainstorming activities can be performed in either the whole class or small groups depending on students’ familiarity with the topic.

In the second phase, the teacher reviews how the deductive English block pattern differs from the inductive Korean essay structure (Hinds, 1990), which first presents relevant information and concludes with a main point. In contrastive rhetoric, the rhetorical differences (Kaplan, 1966) between the first language (L1) and second language (L2) have been investigated by analyzing the unique rhetorical patterns of each language and culture (Eggington, 1987; Hinds, 1990). Therefore, effective L2 writing instruction is essential, particularly for Korean students who have had little practice writing in English (Bae, 2012; Yang & Sohn, 2009). Given the opposite configurations of the two patterns, it is natural that Korean students have difficulties adjusting to the deductive reasoning pattern that begins with a thesis statement and then provides supportive evidence. The teacher then explains the purpose and importance of a thesis statement, and students practice writing their own thesis statements concerning “being single” and “being in a relationship” based on the resources generated in the brainstorming stage. Along with sharing sample writings that clearly illustrate the structure comprising one introductory paragraph, three main-body paragraphs, and one concluding paragraph, the teacher can provide such classroom activities as dividing one essay into five paragraphs and relating this structure to the two patterns (alternating and block arrangements) for organizing a comparison and contrast essay.

Third, the teacher guides the students to write preliminary comparison/contrast essays on the topic they have brainstormed. The teacher reminds the students that the main idea states a major point or the writer’s position on the topic, and each supporting idea gives a piece of information or evidence in favor of the position. After composing the introduction with the thesis statement, the students compose the first block on one topic, followed by a block of matching points of the second item comparison and contrast with the first, then a paragraph summarizing the likenesses and difference, and finally a concluding paragraph restating the writer’s own position and suggesting further considerations. Having helped the students construct their comparison/contrast paragraphs, the teacher can now review the overall

structure of the five-paragraph essay. To guide students in evaluating their own essays, the teacher can provide sample student-written essays from previous classes for the current students to discuss and evaluate as well as compare with their own essays to identify strong and weak points in each. To facilitate this process, the teacher can create an evaluation rubric specific to the assignment (see Appendix). Students can then write a second essay with the five-paragraph structure explaining what they have learned through the lesson on comparison/contrast essay writing. Thus the teacher will have two products for evaluation: the students' preliminary comparison/contrast essays and their five-paragraph explanations of what they have learned. As a follow-up activity, students may be asked to analyze and give feedback to randomly selected classmate's essays in group discussion.

#### 4.6. Step 6: Activation of Background Knowledge for Writing an Essay

Students are now ready to use what they have learned so far in the previous steps to write an English essay comparing and contrasting "Araby" and *Dongbackkot*. The first stage is a warm-up activity in which they review the two works, which they have studied in the previous semester, either as guided intensive reading in the classroom or as an assigned re-reading outside classroom. In this study, the students spend 15 minutes in class re-reading "Araby," which they studied thoroughly in their previous reading class. In the reading course, the emphasis is on developing reading comprehension and critical thinking skills, so a review of the literary elements, such as plot and characters, should be considered necessary. *Dongbackkot*, on the other hand, does not require extra review time as it was a Korean classic work familiar from childhood that they intensively analyzed and critiqued in their Korean literature class.

Although students may have little experience with reading English short stories, the teacher can guide them in applying what they have learned studying Korean literature and reading Korean stories, especially when they share the theme of young love, which is a vital issue for adolescents. In this study, after reviewing "Araby," the students freely discuss the two works. Such discussion can also be held in as a class with the teacher's guidance or in groups independently. In either case, the teacher first leads a brainstorming activity to remind students of the sequence of events, the plot, the setting, and the characters in each story, which can help motivate students to discuss the stories among themselves and eventually to write about them.

#### 4.7. Step 7: Writing a Comparison/Contrast Essay about "Araby" and *Dongbackkot*

After the students reactivate their knowledge about the two stories, the teacher can lead a

whole class activity in which they organize the elements of each story and align them to find the similarities and differences between the two. If necessary the teacher can mediate differences of opinion and coordinate their recall with references to the texts. The teachers may also provide additional suggestions to generate more ideas about the two works. For example, the teacher may provide historical information relevant to the works (e.g., colonial periods in both Ireland and Korea and historical events in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century) and activate students' cultural background knowledge (e.g., Catholicism, secularism, sexual orientation, and Irish or western culture). Such background information often plays a crucial role in understanding literary works. Although these concepts or background information might have been taught in the previous semester, it is important for the students to review these along with the texts as preparation for writing their essays.

Finally, students summarize the discussion topics and write them down to share in small groups. After students' free discussion, the teacher leads in-depth discussion in which the class identifies main ideas, in this case, important points of comparison. This stage is very important to the learning objectives of this writing course, which are for students to be able to identify similarities and differences between two literary works and to compose a five-paragraph essay in which three main points are compared or contrasted. Toward this end, it is important first to evoke a variety of students' perspectives on such literary elements background, atmosphere, the ways the main characters express their emotions, the main conflict, development of the story, and the ending, so that each student feels free to develop his or her own point of view.

As the goal of this course is to familiarize students with the structure of a five-paragraph essay by having them writing a comparison/contrast essay, it is important that the students clarify their position on the three aspects they choose to focus on among the many ideas generated in their discussion. The teacher should then guide students to keep their logic consistent with their stance set at the beginning. Given that another primary objective of this writing activity is to encourage students' creativity and develop their critical thinking, the teacher should not overly emphasize technical aspects such as vocabulary, knowledge, grammar, and punctuation. It is important that the students' thinking processes, not technical correctness, are the target of the activity. To achieve this learning goal, the teacher can provide a glossary of obscure and out-of-date words and difficult phrases in "Araby" with definitions and examples of usage so that the students are not hampered at the word level and can focus their writing on their ideas and the contents of their essays.

With the help of the teacher, the students complete their writing within in the allowed time. The time for the essay writing can vary depending on the readiness of the students and the support that the teacher can provide. Considering the time constraints of a classroom situation, providing ample preparation for writing is recommended, followed by a 30-minute period to write their own essays in class while the teacher monitors the process.

#### 4.8. Step 8: Feedback, Revision, and Assessment

As this writing course emphasizes the process of writing approach advocated by Zamel (1987) focusing on the stages of writing rather than the final product itself (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014; Hyland, 2011; Nordin & Mohammad, 2006), feedback is essential for the students to develop their writing skills and come to better understand themselves through this process. O'Brien (2004) points out that process writing may promote motivation and self-reflection through multiple drafting and feedback from self, peers, or instructors. Students may receive both peer and teacher feedback on their essays. First, the teacher makes copies of all the drafts and independently reviews the originals using a specific rubric created for the assignment, which includes overall block organization, the thesis statement, and main comparison/contrast points in the body, and conclusion, and provides written comments on good and weak points. Then, working in pairs, each student receives the duplicate copy of his/her partner's essay to evaluate based on the rubric. Alternatively, this can be a whole-class activity in which the teacher randomly distributes duplicates among the students after removing the writer's name, the teacher distributes copies to the students and leads a discussion of its strong and weak points. Then the students provide feedback on the duplicate copy of a peer's essay. In both cases, each student receives both the teacher's and peers' feedback. After these evaluations, the teacher selects the highest rated essay as a model for the class.

In this evaluation activity, there may be two types of teacher feedback. One is written feedback, in which the teacher uses the rubric to holistically focus on the five-paragraph essay format of a comparison contrast essay with little emphasis on technical aspects like punctuation, vocabulary, and grammatical errors. The other type of the teacher feedback is an individual face-to-face conference. Each student is given a fifteen-minute time slot to consult with the teacher about his/her strengths and weaknesses, challenges, and other concerns in English writing. Any questions can be raised by the students in this session. Given that every school has a different system, arranging these conferences depends on the affordances within the overall schedule, perhaps during extra-curricular periods. Based on the discussion and comments received during the feedback sessions, whether class, pair, or individual, the students then write their revisions, which can be posted on an online blog shared by this classroom so that they can see their progress and what others have written on the same topic.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to provide a sample lesson plan for using authentic English and Korean literary texts to teach Korean EFL high school students how to write a

comparison/contrast essay following English rhetorical conventions. What we are suggesting here is not the study of literature which focuses on the “literariness of the texts” (Maley, 1989, p. 10); rather, the suggestion that we have mentioned here is the effective use of literature to help English teachers integrate literary texts into their English writing course.

In an effort to provide practical guidelines to the current English teachers, this plan suggests detailed ideas with classroom activities so that teachers can adapt them to their own students’ levels of proficiency. We also suggest that teachers reflect on their own understanding of English essay writing before teaching this topic to students. As the English writing conventions may not be familiar even to Korean English teachers who learned how to write English essays in Korea, they can build their own essay writing skills in English while teaching students in the classroom. Some concepts of which they are not concretely aware may become clearer while teaching the materials step-by-step. Also, some students may find it difficult to constructing three aspects on which to base comparison and contract of the two stories. Thus if possible it is recommended that students first have experience critiquing literature in their own language so as to be familiar with some common aspects of literary analysis.

Teaching this plan reinforces the instructor’s understanding that English writing necessarily needs to be taught systematically and coherently and involve other language skills. Although both teachers and students are already accustomed to improving reading comprehension skills as part of the English language curriculum, they may have difficulty in teaching/learning the productive skills of speaking and writing so these skills are neglected and many Korean students naturally feel burdened when faced with the task of writing an English essay. Thus, this supportive step-by-step approach to writing an essay can be a good method to improve students’ productive skills, and if these can be sufficiently internalized with writing practice, students may find it easier to apply them to speaking. Moreover, this writing instruction can be a starting point of building skills for more complex academic writing projects such as term papers, theses or dissertations, which often involve comparison and contrast.

This study has some limitations. It focuses exclusively on the teacher’s role and lesson planning. Therefore, it would be meaningful to examine learners’ experiences in and perceptions of literature-based writing class, including both benefits and challenges. Another limitation of the approach is that, while the benefits of using short fiction in L2 writing course may be great, this lesson plan may not be appropriate for the lowest level of students, who can focus only on decoding the surface meaning of the text. Further consideration should be given to the needs of students who have difficulty in writing.

Nevertheless, this lesson plan suggests that literature can draw students’ attention, provide authentic language input in a natural way, and help integrate the four language

skills in the English classroom. What is more important, using literary texts as sources for writing can help students improve creativity and practice rhetorical moves in writing. Critical comparison/contrast writing can expand students' thinking on many levels. It is also hoped that the pedagogical suggestions provided here may inspire English teachers to design their own teaching materials using appropriate literary texts to improve their students' English essay writing and balanced communicative skills. Hopefully this research paper will be beneficial for those who want to engage in the English teaching practice.

Applicable levels: Secondary

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## APPENDIX

### Compare and Contrast Essay Rubric

Category	Exceeds the Standard (A+/B+)	Meets the Standard (B-/C-)	Does Not Meet the Standard (D+/F)
Purpose & Supporting Details	The paper compares and contrasts ideas clearly, points to specific examples to illustrate the comparisons and contrast, and includes only the information relevant to the comparison and contrast.	The paper compares and contrasts ideas clearly, but the supporting information is general. The paper includes only the information relevant to the comparison and contrast.	The paper compares and contrasts items clearly, but the supporting information is incomplete, and may include information that is not relevant to the comparison and contrast. (The thesis statement is not supported in the body.)
Organization & Structure	The paper breaks the information into block-by-block structure. It follows a consistent order when discussing the comparison and contrast	The paper breaks the information into point-by-point structure or block-by-block, but may not follow a consistent order when discussing the comparison.	Organizational pattern not identifiable. Some details are not in a logical or expected order, and this distracts the reader.
Transitions	The paper moves smoothly from one idea to the next and uses transition words and subtle transitions to show relationships between ideas.	The paper moves from one idea to the next, but may lack or misuse transition words to show relationships between ideas.	Transitions may be missing; connections between ideas are fuzzy or illogical.
Grammar & Spelling (Conventions)	Writer makes no errors in grammar or spelling.	Writer makes 2-3 errors in grammar or spelling that distract.	Writer makes several errors in grammar or spelling.