

【論文】

Reflections on English Literature Curricula in English Workshop 3/4

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英語ワークショップ3/4における英文学カリキュラムの考察

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Abstract

English Workshop 3/4, the final year of Hiroshima Bunkyo University's General English course, is a literature and literary analysis course. The literature curriculum was officially adopted in 2022 after experimenting with several others. Due to differences in student ability levels, interests, and requests, the course has used seven novels over six semesters of its curriculum, so materials and assignments have been created fresh each semester. This paper outlines the history of how the course adopted a literature curriculum and gives a general overview of the course format. The paper then gives a qualitative reflection of each of the seven novels and their themes and nuances while describing what worked well in class for each, what was challenging, and whether they would be reused if possible. Finally, the paper considers the future of the course and some implications of the literature that teachers should consider.

概要

広島文教大学の一般英語コースの最終学年であるEnglish Workshop 3/4は、文学と文学分析のコースである。文学カリキュラムは、いくつかの異なるカリキュラム試行後、2022年に正式に採用された。学生の能力レベル、興味、要望の違いから、このコースでは6学期間のカリキュラムで7冊の小説を使用し、教材や課題は学期ごとに新しく作成された。本論は、同コースが文学カリキュラムを採用した経緯と、コース形式の概要を説明したものである。また、7冊の小説のそれぞれについて、テーマやニュアンスを質的に考察し、それぞれ授業でうまくいった点、難しかった点、これらの小説が再利用可能かどうかについて述べている。最後に、このコースの将来的な展望と、教師が考慮すべきいくつかの影響について考察する。

1. Introduction

English Workshop 3/4 is the final year of Hiroshima Bunkyo University's Bunkyo English Communication Center (BECC)'s 4-year General English course, available to students in all departments. This course is primarily known for its first two years, English Communication

1/2, a mandatory course for all freshmen, and English Communication 3/4, a course required for Global Communication Department students and elective for all other sophomores. These courses are 15-week CEFR (COE, 2020) aligned four skills courses taught twice a week and utilize a task-based method centered around can-do statements for each lesson. Lessons are grouped into thematic units and attempt to raise students' ability levels from CEFR A1 upon entering university to A2 or from A2 to B1.

However, the final two years of the course (English Workshop 1/2 for juniors and English Workshop 3/4 for seniors) have much more flexibility in terms of their curriculum. Typically, these classes are much smaller than their counterparts in the first two years and consist of only a single weekly lesson over 15 weeks for a single class of students. In recent years, English Workshop 1/2 has run a curriculum centering on listening and spoken production through presentations. With the final year, English Workshop 3/4 seeing typically extremely small class sizes of 1-2 students per year, this led to an important question: what curriculum could be facilitated that differentiates itself from the prior year and best meets the needs of these select students? This paper presents a reflection on the path toward selecting a literature and literary analysis curriculum for the course as well as the six semesters and seven novels read thus far before turning an eye toward the future.

2. The road to literature

Upon inheriting English Workshop 3/4 in 2019, the curriculum centered upon grammar development, utilizing *Grammar Dimensions 3* (Series Editor Diane Larsen Freeman, 2007). At the time, Global Communication and Secondary Education majors were required to take Basic English Communication in their freshman year, which sought to reintroduce English grammar from the basics using *Grammar Dimensions 1*. By using the third book in their senior year, students were afforded an opportunity to refine the communicative language they had learned the previous three years in advance of graduation. In 2019, one Welfare major of roughly CEFR A2+ level (for this and other students, their CEFR ability has been estimated based on their class performance and communicative ability) enrolled for the first semester, indicating general satisfaction and an increase in motivation to study but declining to continue for the second semester.

In the first semester of 2020, I again received one registrant for the course, a B2 level Global Communication major. I informed the student that she was welcome to suggest an alternative curriculum if desired, since I wanted to make sure her needs were best met, and halfway through the first semester, the student requested a Microsoft Excel skill building course to cover and practice some of the basics needed to operate Excel in a professional setting, such as data entry, cell formatting, charts, tables, and some basic and intermediate formulas. Since the student was set to teach at a high school following graduation, the Excel skills and formulas gravitated toward ones that educators often use when creating gradebooks and streaming students into ability groups. In the second semester of 2020, the student again requested a new curriculum: to read *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee (1997, originally published 1960). This became the course's first literature-based curriculum

and would form the basis of what the course was to become in the coming years. However, since the course curriculum was still experimental, no decisions were made on a permanent direction.

In the first semester of 2021, the course reverted to its default grammar curriculum, attended by one B1+ Global Communication major, and she also requested a new curriculum after its halfway point in the first semester. While recognizing her need for further grammar training, she wished to move away from a textbook and toward analyzing news articles to connect the course instruction with current events and discussion points. The student brought a summary of a news article to class each week; after a discussion of the article, we took a closer look at the article's choices of grammatical construction in its sentences and at the student's grammar mistakes in her summary. The final three weeks were dedicated to a final presentation project about a news event of the student's choosing, in this case the 2021 Israel-Palestine crisis.

At the end of the first semester of 2021, I proposed that we explore a novel in the next semester like in 2020. The student was interested primarily in non-fiction and did not desire to read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, seeing it as too difficult. To that end, I proposed reading *Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom (1997). After a successful semester and the highly positive feedback provided in the students' 2020 and 2021 final presentations, as well as stemming my own personal enthusiasm, literature and literary analysis became the course's default curriculum.

Povey (1979, in Kooy & Choi, 1998) stated that offering literature to second language students provides high quality examples of living English with its variety of syntax and vocabulary, and in turn, it sets an "encouragement, guide and target" for student achievement. Kooy and Choi (1998) stated that literature is an integral part of the language learning process as learners acquire English and mold their cultural understandings simultaneously. As was evident by these two books, the students were exposed to a variety of cultural encounters that led to numerous discussions, videos, and reflections, something that is lacking in a grammar curriculum. McKay (2001) concurred, stating that using literature raises students' cross-cultural awareness in addition to demonstrating the importance of form for communication and acting as a springboard for further four-skills development. It is hoped, and supported by the six semesters' worth of student feedback, that having the experience of reading, understanding, and giving an insightful presentation on an English novel broadens students' cultural understandings and gives a tangible capstone English accomplishment to soon-to-be graduates.

3. Building a literature course

English Workshop 3/4 aims to promote four course goals that are adapted from the B2 CEFR Reading Understanding descriptor:

- Reading: Students can read and critically analyze English novels.
- Writing: Students can critically analyze and discuss ideas and themes present in literature.

- Speaking: Students can give an accurate summary of novel contents.
- Speaking: Students can critically analyze and discuss ideas and themes present in literature.

The course outline recommends a B1 or higher English ability to enroll in the course but is not closed to any ability level. Since the prospect of reading an English novel may seem overwhelming, the course makes a point of providing as much support as possible. Vocabulary lists are provided in advance each week and displayed on the front screen while the students read. Depending on the students' levels, these words are either defined in English or translated to Japanese. The bulk of each lesson is reading aloud, done primarily by the students. Gibson (2008) cites several sources of literature against this approach, including reading comprehension being precluded by the memory processing capacity required by non-native speakers when reading text. However, during this time, the teacher steps in frequently to help with difficult word pronunciations or meanings, and sometimes to restructure the entire sentence in a simpler way so that the reader can focus primarily on comprehension. Depending on the student's level and need, this support may be provided in both English and Japanese and may also involve gestures. In case of a particularly difficult to understand chapter or simply to save a modicum of time, the teacher may read aloud instead. While any unfinished reading is assigned for homework, the course aims to complete as much of it as possible during the lesson.

At the midpoint of the semester, students typically write an essay introducing the characters and setting, summarizing the first half of the novel, highlighting their favorite or the most important sections, and providing their overall opinion of the book thus far. For higher level novels, the essay also requires analysis of critical scenes or character decisions. The course ends with a presentation covering some of these same contents: setting, characters, story, and opinion, while adding in a critical analysis of some of the novel's most important themes or elements.

The question of whether to have a specific course novel was easily answered by the two semesters taught thus far by the beginning of 2022. Since the previous two books were of starkly different genres and difficulty levels, not to mention taught to students with different interests and ability levels, it was decided that after reading a diagnostic story (In 2022 and 2023, the class read the 1800-word story *Lather and Nothing Else* by Hernando Téllez), students would choose a book from a variety of proposals during the first lesson that best match their ability and interests. If the course is taken by multiple students, they would need to come to a consensus. For the second semester, the novel can be decided at the end of the first semester (assuming the course takers are the same). This method gives agency to the students in selecting a novel that best matches their needs and interests. Furthermore, it allows students of any level to feel safe that they will not be overwhelmed by a book above their level.

There are some downsides to this method that should be considered. Since the novel is not known until the first week, and, if offered, since one not yet taught during any semester of the course may be selected, the curriculum may need preparation after the start of the semester instead of prior to it. Second, the novel's week-by-week word count is pushed

higher since the first week is unavailable. Although it is ideal to finish the novel by the end of week 13 to give two weeks to complete the final presentation with full knowledge of the novel's ending, this is not always possible. Finally, students need to procure the novel in advance of the second lesson, and the novel might not always be available to purchase or arrive quickly. Nonetheless, the positives of letting the students choose their novel outweigh these drawbacks.

Gajdusek (1998) described pieces of English literature as “highly charged cultural artifacts” which assume readers carry the same cultural knowledge and assumptions as the writer. Teachers, according to Gajdusek (1998), must help our second language learners establish frameworks for these missing assumptions to allow the readers to experience and enjoy the work at a deeper level. Thus, in addition to reading, the first lesson of a new novel focuses on introducing the setting and characters, often with visual aids such as a character chart or a short video clip. Furthermore, if a film (or cartoon) adaptation of the novel is available, it is watched in class during the semester. These help the students become grounded, as anxiety levels are often high until the rhythm of the course and the novel are more apparent and help to mitigate cultural interference and misrepresentation (Gajdusek, 1998). The timing of showing the film depends on how well the students are understanding the text and story: if students are struggling, showing the film (partway) early gives students a concrete visual representation of the setting and characters and allows students to fill in any early story comprehension gaps. In stories where early content plays an important role in later plot points, this can be vitally important for students' comprehension and enjoyment. Once the novel is finished, the film can be as well. If students are not struggling, showing the film in the final lessons is a fun and motivating way to cap the semester: as having one's comprehension of plot and character points in a foreign language realized on screen lets students truly know that they were able to accomplish their reading goal. As described below, films have been shown as early as week 3 or as late as the final lesson depending on need.

4. Six semesters of English novels

This section gives details about the seven novels taught to date in the course. A summary is shown in Table 1 below:

Semester	Novel	Students	Estimated CEFR Ability
Semester 2, 2020	To Kill a Mockingbird	1	B2
Semester 2, 2021	Tuesdays with Morrie	1	B1+
Semester 1, 2022	The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time	2	B1+ / B1
Semester 2, 2022	And Then There Were None	1	B1
Semester 1, 2023	Holes	1	A1+/A2
Semester 2, 2023	Sideways Stories from Wayside School & Wayside School is Falling Down	1	A1+/A2

Table 1 – Six semester overview

Each section will discuss the rationale for choosing the novel, describe any difficulties encountered, teaching methods, key elements and discussion points, and give a reflection of the semester and novel’s efficacy. The overviews also state each novel’s word count and the number of words per reading lesson and as well as its ATOS readability (Milone, 2012) and Flesch-Kincaid grade level score. ATOS readability measures words per sentence, the average grade level of words, and characters per word, while Flesch-Kincaid grade level scores are calculated through a formula of total words, total sentences, and total syllables. However, neither ATOS nor Flesch-Kincaid scores were the determining factor when selecting a novel for the course and are presented here for the sake of discussion and comparison. As detailed, stylistic choices, regional vocabulary, density of subject, and student interest played a larger role in determining appropriateness.

4.1 *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Conducted in the second semester of 2020 with one B2 ability student, *To Kill a Mockingbird* remains the only novel chosen specifically by the student. Set in the deep south in the 1930’s during the Great Depression, the story follows the prosecution of an African American man accused of assaulting a white woman. The man is defended by a lawyer named Atticus Finch, and the story is told through his six-year-old daughter Scout’s eyes. Table 2 below provides an overview.

First Published	1960	Word Count	99121
Author	Harper Lee	Words Per Lesson (Total Reading Lessons)	7624 (13)
Genre	Southern Gothic; Bildungsroman	ATOS Readability Score	5.6
Film?	Yes (1962)	Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	8.1
Key Themes	Coming-of-age; childhood and innocence; fairness; racism and prejudice		

Table 2 - *To Kill a Mockingbird* overview

Despite the student’s high ability level, reading the novel was exceedingly challenging during the first half of the semester for several reasons. First, the book contains a challenging and dense lexis, including a wealth of specialized vocabulary representative of the American deep south. As the course format was not yet settled, there was not yet the structure in place to create a translated vocabulary list of terms, and instead, the student relied on English-to-English Quizlet vocabulary sets to help parse the text. Because of the number of words each week, it was impossible to read the entire text out loud and thus receive in-class teacher support for each chapter. Second, the novel introduces a preponderance of characters in its early chapters, and several of them have nicknames in addition to their given names. This made keeping track of characters and their names difficult for the student, although this was aided by a character chart provided during the third lesson. Third, the student did not come equipped with the historical and cultural

contextual knowledge of the 1930's Great Depression era, the contextual framework of which many native speakers already have. YouTube video clips detailing the Great Depression were shown in the course's first weeks to provide this context, but it is difficult to fully understand the characters' references to economic hardships and lack of modern conveniences without having studied the history in detail. Finally, although Atticus Finch's defense of Tom Robinson is the centralized narrative of the novel, the first half of the book largely deals with the children's games and pranks toward their neighbor Boo Radley, a recluse whom the children have never met. Thus, the student may have felt confused by this initial subversion since she was already aware of the novel's secondary story arc prior to reading it but not its first.

Sensing the student's initial struggles, we began watching the film in the third week and continued it in weeks five, ten, and fourteen. Being able to visualize the novel went a long way toward easing the student's anxieties. Furthermore, weekly writing homework assignments began in week 5, as it was clear that the student was not able to summarize and discuss the assigned chapters without guiding questions. I also suggested the student listen to an audiobook of the novel on YouTube in addition to reading it, as her listening comprehension generally outpaced her reading, and she later noted that this was particularly helpful.

The novel focuses on the themes of racism, prejudice, fairness, as well as childhood innocence and transformation, and the student was asked to analyze these themes in both the writing assignment and presentation. While in some cases the student's analysis was surface level, and there were some inaccuracies in relaying story details, the student noted that the novel gave her a better understanding of prejudice and privilege and its modern-day relevance. Furthermore, she was able to adeptly detail the main character's transformation and loss of innocence in a way that conveyed true understanding. To this end, *To Kill a Mockingbird* had a positive impact on the student, as she remarked in her final assignment that the book was "one everyone has to read". While challenging to teach, particularly as a first course novel, it would be a book I would be happy to revisit given the appropriate students and English skillset. However, the amount of vocabulary, the foreign background and context, and the sheer length and difficulty lessens the likelihood for the novel to be selected again.

4.2. *Tuesdays with Morrie*

Tuesdays with Morrie was taught in the second semester of 2021 with one B1+ ability student. The novel was selected due to the student's affinity toward non-fiction after having completed the news-related grammar course. The novel follows author Mitch Albom's weekly conversations with his former college professor and mentor Morrie Schwartz, who has been diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS). Each week, Morrie imparts a portion of his guiding philosophy for living a good life to Mitch. A summary is provided in Table 3.

First Published	1997	Word Count	34894
Author	Mitch Albom	Words Per Lesson (Total Reading Lessons)	2684 (13)
Genre	Non-Fiction, Philosophical	ATOS Readability Score	5.5
Film?	Yes (1999)	Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	8
Key Themes	Philosophy, Lessons for Life		

Table 3 – *Tuesdays with Morrie* overview

The structure of *Tuesdays with Morrie* is quite consistent: Mitch’s 14 weekly visits to Morrie are chapter-separated and each deal with a separate theme such as family, emotions, or death. Between chapters are snippets of Mitch and Morrie’s conversations from either of the two intersecting points in their lives. Although the ATOS readability and Flesch-Kincaid grade level scores are largely unchanged from *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the novel is nearly three times as short. Very little of the text needed to be assigned for homework, allowing for nearly all the text to be read aloud in class. Furthermore, the Japanese edition of the novel contained a translated glossary. Finally, there are only two major characters and a small number of minor characters, negating any need to keep track of a complicated character web.

Despite this, the student remarked in the first few weeks that the novel was a bit difficult. The novel contains references to 1990’s USA news and popular culture (such as the 1995 OJ Simpson trial), which need to be expressly covered by the teacher. Unlike *To Kill a Mockingbird*, where the cultural context enriches understanding of the novel’s themes, these provide only a modicum of contextual importance but ought still to be explained to avoid confusion. It was also a bit difficult for the student to understand the novel’s structure and timeline: Morrie and Mitch’s conversations are framed as a “final class” despite it being sixteen years removed from their college years, and until the rhythm of Mitch’s Tuesday visits are settled, there are several flashbacks and flashforwards that make parsing the context difficult. Mitch also laments the loss of his sense of humanity and humility compared to Morrie, and this tension looms large over their weekly encounters. Grasping this concept, particularly for a non-native speaker who was unfamiliar with notions of humanity and humility to begin with, was a challenging endeavor.

In addition to a film, *Tuesdays with Morrie* has an audiovisual accompaniment: a series of interviews with Morrie by a well-known American broadcaster that is also referenced several times in the novel. These interviews were watched in weeks three, six, and twelve, the lessons after they were introduced in the text. While these videos certainly are worthwhile in allowing the student to see and listen to Morrie directly and hear a discussion of some of the same talking points in the book, their dated visual and sound quality make them not the most effective teaching tool. By contrast, the film, watched in week 14, was highly effective in reinforcing the text and assuaging any understanding uncertainties

despite some creative liberties taken that were not in the novel. If taught again, it would be worthwhile to show less of the interviews (but not cut them entirely, as they add highly meaningful context) and start the film in the early weeks of the semester to help solidify the early context.

The weekly homework worksheets differed from *To Kill a Mockingbird* by moving away from chapter summaries and toward comprehension and opinion questions, compression and opinion questions. As the course wore on, chapter and page number references were provided due to the density of the philosophical content, which made the worksheets easier. The student's overall understanding of the novel increased each week, and by the final week was able to synthesize the novel's lessons into a final presentation. The student chose to discuss themes of family, fear of aging, money, love, marriage, and culture. She did a satisfactory job of conveying the lessons as Morrie described, and while she was not able to discuss how each theme individually applies to her own life, she was able to apply these lessons collectively, stating if she graduates and loses her own sense of humanity, she wants to come back to this novel for rediscovery. She also recommended this novel for Japanese high school students due to their immense anxieties about the future. Likewise, in both the final presentation and in the course evaluation, the student showed high positivity toward the novel and the course.

Overall, teaching *Tuesdays with Morrie* was both highly rewarding and slightly draining. It easily invites both the student and the teacher for reflections on what it means to live a good life, resulting in a variety of interesting and insightful discussions. At the same time, despite its shorter length, the novel asks a lot of students to read it in a foreign language. Using Japanese was often necessary to ensure her understanding of Morrie's lessons, as there were concepts that were even difficult for her to verbalize in her own L1. However, the novel is one I would be happy revisiting, given the appropriate student level and genre interest.

4.3 *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*

The first semester of 2022 marked the first time the course outline officially designated the course as a literature course. Two Education department students, one B1 and another B1+ registered and selected *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* (hereafter *The Curious Incident*) by Mark Haddon (2003). The story follows the diary of Christopher Boone, a high school age boy with an unspecified yet severe spectrum disorder, as he attempts to discover who killed his neighbor's dog. This novel was selected after the introductory short story as students were intrigued by its mystery genre, its humorous beginner, and its unusual narrator. Table 4 provides an overview:

First Published	2003	Word Count	62005
Author	Mark Haddon	Words Per Lesson (Total Reading Lessons)	5167 (12)
Genre	Mystery, Bildungsroman	ATOS Readability Score	5.4
Film?	No	Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	7
Key Themes	Coming-of-age, Perspectives, Forgiveness		

Table 4 – *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* overview

While the general storyline of *The Curious Incident* is easy to grasp, there are several other considerations that can make the novel challenging. For readers, *The Curious Incident* is immediately striking due to Christopher’s spectrum disorder. Since the novel is in diary format and written from a first-person viewpoint, the readers only have Christopher’s perspective on the events around him. While his ideas and his interactions with others are always rational in his eyes, they are often highly unusual when considered from a traditional perspective. Christopher often gets in trouble, either with the law, his family, or strangers, due to his strictly literal and emotion-devoid interpretations. When considered from above, it is clear why these complications are occurring; this layering makes the novel fascinating to a native speaker, but from a non-native viewpoint, it often needed to be spelled out to students who may be used to taking text at face value when parsing it in a foreign language. Christopher also breaks up the main story with chapters on his own thought processes and inspirations, such as references to Sherlock Holmes stories, the history of the Monty Hall Problem, or a definition of a homunculus. These concepts may be completely foreign and need to be deliberately taught.

The students did their best to keep up with the story, completing weekly comprehension and critical thinking questions and writing a reflection essay on a critical moment between Christopher and his father. This novel was the first to use a teacher-prepared vocabulary list of 190 terms, with the students asked to provide their own translations. Looking back, preparing a more extensive list with translations or English definitions, as done for future novels, would be a better course. For a final presentation, students were asked to analyze how Christopher’s mind works, how he tends to approach situations, his personal goals, and the lessons he teaches us in the novel. As the two students were both education majors and future teachers, the novel afforded them an opportunity to consider their approach to a potential class student with a spectrum disorder, and they were asked in their presentation to describe this eventuality.

This novel was the only one to lack a film adaptation. While there are several amateur stage productions that can easily be found online, a formal production by London’s National Theatre does not have any purchasable video at this time. In lieu, trailers of the production were shown in class to at least allow for a visualization of the characters. In addition, videos from the perspective of children with spectrum disorders were shown to help consider

Christopher’s perspective of his surroundings and others. Ultimately, the higher B1+ student was able to give a thorough final presentation and analysis of the novel, while the lower B1 ability student’s presentation was not quite satisfactory. The course evaluation results were a bit muted, with course satisfaction scores the lowest of the six semesters. Thus, while certainly a worthwhile choice for the right student, choosing *The Curious Incident* should be a deliberate choice for a B1+ or above student looking for something quite different and able to interpret text from multiple perspectives.

4.4 *And Then There Were None*

At the end of the first semester of 2022, the B1 student requested a mystery horror novel for the second semester (the other student had a scheduling conflict and could not continue the course). He was familiar with Agatha Christie, having watched the 2015 BBC mini-series of *And Then There Were None* (2015, original text 1939) but forgotten most of the details. I suggested we read the novel since he already had the background context, and he readily agreed. The story follows ten strangers who arrive for a party on Soldier Island after being invited by an unknown host. However, the host never appears, and after dark secrets are revealed about each of the guests’ past, they begin mysteriously dying one by one. Table 5 below provides a summary:

First Published	1939	Word Count	52656
Author	Agatha Christie	Words Per Lesson (Total Reading Lessons)	4048 (13)
Genre	Mystery, Suspense	ATOS Readability Score	5.7
Film?	Yes (Several, 2015 shown)	Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	7
Key Themes	Justice, Guilt, Punishment		

Table 5 – *And Then There Were None* overview

I was initially very wary of the level of language in the novel. The ATOS score places it at 5.7, which is only marginally higher than the three other novels, while the Flesch-Kincaid score deems it the same grade level as *The Curious Incident*. However, having been written nearly a century earlier and using a large selection of British English vocabulary and colloquialisms, even developing a vocabulary list as a native (American) speaker was a challenge. For example, the first chapter uses “sailed near the wind”, “fighting shy”, and “a near-thing”, which absolutely must be taught explicitly by a teacher for the text to make any sense to a non-native speaker. To that end, unlike the brief lists made for *The Curious Incident*, the vocabulary list became far more extensive, totaling 572 words and phrases, with English definitions provided. Furthermore, one characteristic of the novel is the frequent rotation of which character’s perspective is being followed (including their thoughts being heard by the reader). These characters all have distinct speech patterns: for example, Justice Wargrave speaks in longer sentences with numerous higher-level

vocabulary terms, while Inspector Blore's sentences are shorter, choppy, and full of slang terms and phrases. Once the reader is familiar with these conventions, they can be enjoyed tremendously as they bring out each character's unique personality, but they require the teacher's express coaching to be grasped by the student.

There were also two chapters of particular concern: the first and last. The first chapter introduces the main characters in a whirlwind of setting changes and flashbacks while providing the first examples of the lexical style differences between them. To this end, it was important to provide character charts with each homework assignment to classify the information relayed in each chapter. The first four homework assignments, respectively, asked the student to codify each character's profession and why they are traveling to the island (lesson 1), their physical description (lesson 2), who they are accused of killing (lesson 3) and the details they provide about that killing (lesson 4). This helped set the groundwork for the later revelations in the novel. In the early lessons, these exercises replaced the usual opinion questions in the homework assignments, which were brought back after the characters were well established. The final chapter is fully expositional and contains no dialogue. However, despite its difficulty, the student was fully invested in the novel at this point and was eager to be taught the chapter's difficult vocabulary and phrasing until he understood what was written.

As the midpoint of the novel does not lend itself toward thematic analysis, the midterm writing assignment was kept simple, focusing on setting, plot, characters, and the student's opinion thus far. At the B1 level, the student accomplished this task without much difficulty. The final presentation dug deeper into thematic analysis, asking the student to describe the novel's symbols, use of foreshadowing, and overarching themes of guilt, justice, and punishment, and despite a passing score, the student was not quite able to provide enough analysis with his ability level.

Had the student not watched the 2015 miniseries, it would have been ideal to show it in the first or second lesson to allay fears that the first chapter would cause. In this case, we watched the mini-series largely for enjoyment after finishing the novel in weeks 14 and 15. Although the first two lessons were as difficult as anticipated, because of the student's proclivity toward mystery and horror, the student enjoyed the novel tremendously and even asked for lessons to be moved forward to approach the ending faster. Following suit, the course evaluation results showed much more positivity than *The Curious Incident*. Knowing this reaction, I would be inclined to recommend this novel again for students at a minimum B1 level, but preferably B1+ or higher.

4.5 Holes

Holes is a young adult fiction novel by Louis Sachar (2015, originally published 1998). This novel was selected in the first semester of 2023 with one Primary Education major and was the first children's or young adult novel selected for the curriculum due to the lower ability level (CEFR A1+/A2) of the student shown after the diagnostic short story. The story follows a teenage boy named Stanley who is wrongfully sent to an internment camp where inmates are required to dig a 1.5 cubic meter hole every day. After befriendng another of

the inmates, a ward of the state, Stanley and his friend discover the true purpose of the camp and how both of their family's pasts weigh on the present. A summary is given in Table 6 below.

First Published	1998	Word Count	47079
Author	Louis Sachar	Words Per Lesson (Total Reading Lessons)	3621 (13)
Genre	Young adult fiction; adventure	ATOS Readability Score	4.6
Film?	Yes (2013)	Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	5.2
Key Themes	Past and Present Connections, Racism, Literacy, Masculinity, Fairness		

Table 6: *Holes* Overview

Holes has several elements which make it an intriguing read for students. First, there is a deliberate focus on past vs present in the novel which adds a sense of mystery. The novel contains three generations of stories: two in the past (three and four generations ago) in addition to Stanley's present. These stories are interspliced together, and readers uncover how decisions made by characters in the past have a direct impact on their future counterparts. Each week allows students a new opportunity to decipher more of the story and put their predictions into writing.

Second, despite being a novel for young adults, there are several mature themes students will encounter. The most powerful of these is racism: a likeable character in the past timeline is murdered because of his skin color, setting off a chain reaction that puts much of the story in motion. This event is made more powerful as there are few racial disputes in the present timeline which had been depicted until this point: non-white characters hold roles of authority and are not questioned because of their skin color, and while one race-related dispute is raised, it is not the main catalyst for the subsequent plot events. Conversely, Stanley and his friend are white and black, respectively, and end up supporting each other throughout the novel's second half. While nowhere near as deep as the depiction in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the sudden appearance of racism regardless is an uncomfortable one for students to consider, yet provides them a chance to reflect on the realities of past discrimination and privilege. The novel also touches on elements of illiteracy and homelessness (all in Stanley's friend's case, where he grew up homeless, never learned to read, and was mocked because of it).

Despite the lower ATOS readability and Flesch-Kincaid grade level scores, there is a breadth of B1 or higher vocabulary needing to be covered in each lesson. For simplicity's sake, the vocabulary was directly translated into Japanese instead of using English definitions. Like with the other novels, the first few lessons of *Holes* saw the student struggle with understanding the story's setting and context. This was exacerbated by the introduction of the intersplicing timelines in the second lesson. However, by following a

similar plan of introducing the film after 5 lessons and watching up to the point in the story to reinforce the story and/or fix misunderstandings, the novel became smoother with each passing week.

Ultimately, *Holes* was a highly enjoyable read, and the student showed a very positive response to it, remarking it “was his new favorite book”. The dawning realization of the past and present timelines’ resolution was highly impactful and delightful for the student. However, at the CEFR A1+/A2 level, it required constant teacher support and reinforcement, particularly regarding vocabulary, and the elements of the novel were not fully explored due to discussions of the more mature themes being limited by the student’s low communicative ability. I would consider the book appropriate for learners up to the B1 level, as there is still plenty of higher-level vocabulary left for learners at this level, and stronger discussions of the mature themes can be had in both discussions and writing.

4.6 Wayside School Series

Upon finishing *Holes*, the student desired to read an easier book in the second semester of 2023. After presenting several options, the student chose *Sideways Stories from Wayside School* (2019, originally published 1978) & *Wayside School is Falling Down* (2019, originally published 1989), as he wanted to continue reading the works of Louis Sachar. These stories are the first two in a set of four children’s novels about a school built sideways: thirty stories up in the air. The novels introduce and present stories about the children who attend class on the school’s top floor. A summary is presented in Table 7 below:

First Published	1978 (SS) / 1989 (FD)	Word Count (combined)	49022 (SS 20395; FD 28627)
Author	Louis Sachar	Words Per Lesson (Total Reading Lessons)	3502 (14: SS 6, FD 8)
Genre	Children’s Fiction, Dark Comedy	ATOS Readability Score	3.3 (SS) / 3.4 (FD)
Film?	Yes (2005 cartoon)	Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	4
Key Themes	School + Childhood, Lateral Thinking, Word Play		

Table 7 – *Wayside School* Series Summary

With ATOS scores of only 3.3 and 3.4 and a Flesch-Kincaid grade level score of 4, these two books are by far the lowest in English level read so far in the course. Furthermore, unlike the other novels, the *Wayside School* chapters are nearly exclusively episodic: outside of one three-chapter arc, each chapter’s story is self-contained and usually does not play an important role in future plot points. Chapters are short and contain no more than one or two major characters. For the A1+/A2 level student, this format was considerably easier than *Holes*. Although an extensive translated vocabulary list was still necessary for each lesson, the student was able to grasp the context quickly and go from story to story without difficulty. Furthermore, because of the extensive use of humor, the student seemed to highly

anticipate reading further and discovering more of the text.

Like *Holes*, most of the lessons were spent reading chapters aloud, and the student could complete each week's reading within the class time. Homework assignments were also kept simple, with basic comprehension questions per chapter along with one or two opinion questions. Each week, the student was asked to predict the contents of the next chapters after being given the main characters and plot points of each. Because of the simplicity of the novels, there was little confusion or need for extensive explanations.

One major theme of the novels is lateral thinking, where the text deliberately subverts the reader's expectations. For example, text in one chapter is written upside down by a character who is sitting upside down, and another chapter is written entirely backwards without warning and expects the reader to figure out what is happening. Word play is also common, where a word or sentence in the text has a different meaning to what is initially implied. These intentional traps were the only difficulties the student faced. Some of these needed explaining, but others were discovered naturally with the student's own ability, and cracking these puzzles in a second language added to the student's sense of discovery and accomplishment. Unlike *Holes*, these puzzles did not span the arc of the novel but instead were contained only within a single chapter. A cartoon adaptation of the novels which references several of these duplicitous plot points was briefly shown in week 14, and the student seemed happy to recognize them as they were being experienced by the characters. Besides these puzzles and wordplay, one drawback to these novels is the lack of content to critically analyze (It was for this reason that the books did not appear on any beginning-of-term suggestion list until this semester). The writing assignment, assigned after competing *Sideways Stories* in week 6, was kept simple, requiring only a discussion of favorite stories along with an early reflection. The final presentation required a short piece of analysis of the lateral thinking and wordplay, and the student was able to give a brief commentary. However, the bulk of the presentation was a thorough discussion of the setting and characters. While this was more than satisfactory due for this student's level, it is doubtful to be sufficiently challenging for students at higher ability levels. For students of a similar A1+/A2 level, these novels represented a fantastic way to gain reading experience and confidence. The student was enthusiastic about reading the last two novels on his own and reading the stories to his own children and future elementary school students.

5. Future Considerations

Over its six semesters as a literature course, English Workshop 3/4 has provided an opportunity for students of differentiated English levels to achieve a common goal: completing and discussing a novel in a foreign language. Despite initial difficulties in becoming grounded with the plot, setting, and characters, all but one of the novels (*The Curious Incident*) received overwhelmingly positive evaluations and praise from students in their final presentation and course evaluations, and as an educator, it has likewise been a rewarding experience. Going forward, this course format will continue in 2024. Ideally, the coverage of novels completed allows for an appropriate selection of one previously used.

However, if any of the novels from the first three semesters are repeated, the vocabulary lists, homework assignments, and projects will be revamped to meet the standard of the latter three semesters.

The possibility remains that additional novels may be added to the course curricula. For stronger students (B1 or higher), the first four novels cluster around similar difficulty points, providing a variety of genres, while for lower ability students (A2 or below), the Louis Sachar novels present highly entertaining and engrossing stories. Conversely, for students at the high A2 or low B1 level, there may still exist a gap which a new novel might fill. While *Holes* is the closest to this range, a novel that fits between ATOS 4.6 / Flesch-Kincaid 5.2 and the next highest (*The Curious Incident* with ATOS 5.4 / Flesch-Kincaid 7) might be worth exploring. Some possibilities to bridge this gap could include *Where the Red Fern Grows* by Wilson Rawls (ATOS 4.9 / Flesch-Kincaid 6) or *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini (ATOS 5.2 / Flesch-Kincaid 6.8).

Finally, it is important to consider that when teaching literature in the second language classroom, educators should be aware of the cultural assumptions when conveying the text's theme and morals, and to what extent this may shape students' assumptions of reality. Four of the six novels in this course deal with social, moral, or health issues: *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Holes* with discussions of racism and discrimination, *Tuesdays with Morrie* with lessons of morality, and *The Curious Incident* with its depiction of its main character with a spectrum disorder. Both *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Curious Incident* have seen their share of criticism. Recently, *To Kill a Mockingbird* has seen more and more educators objecting to its inclusion in K-12 schools due to an antiquated depiction of black Americans as helpless and dependent on white saviors such as Atticus Finch (see Saney, 2003). While Christopher's disorder is never stated plainly in *The Curious Incident*, the novel heavily implies a severe form of autism or Asperger's syndrome. While the novel has been praised for bringing an autistic character to the forefront, it has been likewise criticized by some as an unrealistic portrayal, with Christopher's behavior lacking consistency for people with autism spectrum disorder and depicting them as pitiable (see Valente, 2022 and Barrett, 2016).

It is impossible for any text to represent a full picture of any culture or people (Kooy and Chiu, 1998). When helping facilitate books in a foreign language, an educator also allows students to discuss and analyze the themes and culture present beyond the simple text. What responsibility does the educator then have to caution the reader about any depictions that may not reflect the entire reality to avoid coloring their viewpoints? Kooy and Chiu (1998) noted that literature, as the primary source for acculturation, has the tendency to present stereotypes, and "the often blurred boundaries between a teacher's obligation to direct students to a particular understanding of the context of the work and the tendency to thereby limit students' understanding reflects a teacher's living reality." As this reading facilitator and the voice of authority in the classroom, the second language teacher may wish to consider whether counterpoints to the novel, be it historical, social, or cultural, should be introduced in class, and if possible, added as a reflection piece to assignments. If time permits, book reviews offering these counterpoints to the novel could be read upon its

completion to provide additional viewpoints.

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