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EN CONTACTO**

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**“THE USE OF ENGLISH LITERATURE IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH
AS SECOND LANGUAGE”**

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Believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, — that is genius.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Self-Reliance”

Introduction

This MA dissertation focuses on the teaching of the English language through the use of literature. The main purpose is to use the literary text as a resource which enhances the acquisition of the foreign language by means of different activities that allow students the enjoyment of literature while they notice that there are other ways of learning English.

This research is motivated by the necessity of approaching literature to Secondary students and using it in the teaching of English. The following MA dissertation could be considered as a continuation of another paper titled *Implementación de destrezas lectoras en el aula de lengua extranjera, inglés*. In the light of the results I obtained during the realization of the aforementioned paper, I have wanted to broaden the research scope with a new element: literature as a resource which is able to expand the overall knowledge of English in the Secondary Education.

My proposal here is the presentation and use of different activities designed under the influence of diverse literary approaches trying to demonstrate that the use of literature as a teaching resource could improve the overall understanding of the English language in its process of acquisition as a foreign language. That is, I intend to promote the use of literature in language teaching by proposing activities that would exploit the literary text from different perspectives and would enhance the students' knowledge of the English language.

This dissertation is divided in three chapters. First, I will deal with the different studies produced in this particular field focusing on the concepts of literary competence and language competence, and the main factors affecting the understanding of a literary text. After that, we will focus our attention on the possible literary approaches analyzing them and creating a set of activities that can improve the acquisition of the foreign

language through the use of a literary text and paying special attention to the selection of texts and the main difficulties to be faced.

Secondly, those activities will be introduced in a Secondary English classroom trying to involve the students in the process of learning. After that, I will analyze the results in order to prove that although there are many different ways to enhance the acquisition of a foreign language, an early instruction with literary texts will benefit both, the reading comprehension and the acquisition of any foreign language.

Finally, I will conclude this paper by summarizing the results obtained from the practice and suggesting some possible lines of study for the future.

Justification

For many years the use of literature in the teaching of English as a foreign language has been relegated to the background:

As far as English language teaching is concerned, literature has over recent years been generally purged from the programme, together with other undesirable elements like grammar and translation, on the grounds that it makes no contribution to the purpose or the process of learning the language for practical use (Widdowson 180).

The diverse teaching models used throughout history in the acquisition of a foreign language have dealt with literature in many different ways. Namely, the Grammar-translation Approach, which was based on a deductive study of grammatical rules, the translation of literary texts and a contrastive analysis between the mother tongue and the foreign language, considered the translation of literature as a useful tool to teach a language. Subsequent models such as the Direct Method, the Audio-lingual Method, or the Total Physical Response (TPR) showed certain weaknesses in the acquisition of reading skills. However, recent teaching methods such as the Task-based

Approach and the Communicative Approach pay more attention to the development of the four basic skills taken into account in the teaching of a foreign language: reading, writing, listening and speaking. Since all these disciplines must receive a similar attention, literature could find its place among all of them.

The use of literature as a technique for teaching both basic language skills (i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking) and language areas (i.e. vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation) is very popular within the field of foreign language learning and teaching (Hismanoglu 2).

Nevertheless, the use of literary texts in Secondary Education is still a matter of debate because the majority of teachers just use literary texts as a reading material, leaving aside the potential of literature to practice the rest of skills. As a matter of fact, the Common European Framework (CEF) states that “literary studies serve many more educational purposes- intellectual, moral, and emotional, linguistic and cultural [...]” (56). Thus, the different levels of the CEF from B2 to C2 include literary texts in their definitions of proficiency (27):

- B2: [...] I can understand contemporary literary prose.
- C1: I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts.
- C2: I can read [...] literary works.

Nowadays, availability of graded texts and the possibilities to adapt activities to the different levels of proficiency of the students provide an opportunity for teachers to introduce literary texts in lower levels in order to increase the students’ linguistic and literary competence. As Widdowson (186) remarks, “the task for literature teaching, then is, [...] to develop a pedagogy which will guide learners towards an independent ability to read literature for themselves”. Moreover, Collie and Slater (5-7) classify the benefits of literature in the language learning process in four different categories:

1. Valuable authentic material.
2. Cultural enrichment.
3. Language enrichment.
4. Personal involvement.

The use of literary texts offers students many different opportunities to develop the acquisition of the foreign language. As a matter of fact, through the use and study of literary texts, the students acquire and enhance among others, the following competences:

- The reading competence. We must consider reading as one of the four basic pillars in the acquisition of any language and the key element in the development of communicative skills and a primary source for a correct writing.
- The language competence: including the linguistic or grammatical knowledge
- The literary competence
- The cultural competence

McRae and Boardman (1) state that teachers might “improve and develop students’ *understanding and use of the language* through the reading and discussion of literary texts”. From this quotation we deduce that the literary text can be a stimulus for language development while it offers many opportunities to develop the acquisition of a foreign language.

1. Theoretical framework

1.1. Advantages and disadvantages of literature in the English Foreign Language (EFL) classroom

As we have seen before, the use of literature in Secondary Education has usually been considered a useful resource to improve the students' reading competence but it has more potential than that. Although the literary text usually possesses a complex literary discourse, this difficulty can be easily overcome by anticipating and solving this sort of problems in advance and thus making possible the use of literature for other purposes.

1.1.1. Disadvantages

For a long time, literature has been excluded from the syllabus because it has been regarded as a problematic resource in the teaching of English as a foreign language. Indeed, some scholars argue that certain literary genres could contain complexities such as the creative use of language, which often deviates from the conventions. Those aspects are particularly visible in poetry and drama (Mendoza 1-2). Moreover, Hill comments that teachers often complain that the language of literature is irrelevant to the learners' needs (9).

1.1.2. Advantages

On the other hand, the reasons for the teaching of literature in the language classroom are much more powerful. Hence, this section covers the advantages involved in the use of literature from the enhancement of the language competence to the benefits of using authentic materials.

- **Language competence:** the study of language through literature (a task usually considered boring and tedious) can be transformed into a more entertaining and exciting activity, especially, if these activities are part of an interesting topic for

the students. Furthermore, as Carter and Long point out “literature is a legitimate and valuable resource for language teaching” (4).

- **Motivation:** it is evident that both feelings and emotions determine the success of learning. Consequently, teachers must be able to motivate their students:

[...] students need to be able to identify and identify *with* the experiences, thoughts and situations which are depicted in the text. They need to be able to discover the kind of pleasure and enjoyment which comes from making the text their own (Carter and Long 5-6).

- **Cultural awareness:** this is one of the most outstanding advantages since there are few other ways as effective as literature to help our students understand another culture. In addition, Ghosn remarks that:

Literature has the potential to change attitudes and perceptions, and to diminish negative conducts and prejudices while boosting catharsis, empathy, sympathy, forgiveness, tolerance, etc. [...] it is believed that literature has a well-rooted pedagogical value since it can involve learners in problem-solving tasks through resolving conflicts (Ghosn qtd. in Khatib *et al.* 215).

- **Authentic material:** the language used in literary texts is real, as opposed to the language used in text books, which does not reflect authentic communicative situations and usually discourages the students.

1.2. Language competence and literary competence

1.2.1. Language competence

Undoubtedly, literature is made of language and consequently the understanding of the literary text is a factor totally dependent of the understanding of the language used on it. The Common European Framework (CEF) identifies the following components as part of the language competence (123-128):

- **Lexical competence**, which is the knowledge of the vocabulary of a language.
- **The grammatical competence**, which refers to the knowledge and ability to use the grammatical resources of a language.
- **The semantic competence** which deals with the learner's awareness and control of the organization of meaning.

If the students do not acquire those competences, they would not understand a text. According to Widdowson “[...] a study of literature is in fact analogous with the study of language” (185). As a consequence, this sort of problems or difficulties must be solved.

1.2.2. Literary competence

Literary competence is understood as the different skills needed to achieve understanding of the literary text. Therefore, teachers must be aware of those necessary skills that may help their students comprehend the text. Some of the most significant ones deal with reading strategies, intercultural competence and literary knowledge.

- **Reading strategies.** Reading strategies are defined as the different steps students must follow so as to obtain the acquisition, storage, restoration and use of information (Molina 144). As a consequence, once students start reading, they must bear in mind those strategies they would use in case they face any difficulty. Therefore, teachers should teach their students all the possible reading

strategies they can use when reading a text. At the same time, “the use of literary texts for the purpose of reading instruction, then, could at least offer an encounter with literature” (Pieper 10).

Among the reading strategies used to achieve the understanding of the literary text we can identify the activation of the students’ previous knowledge about a particular topic, procedures aimed at the understanding of new vocabulary items, techniques used to identify the terms that are not necessary to understand the general meaning of the text, or analysis of word formation or composition, taking into account that the components of a word can be analyzed so as to infer its meaning.

- **Intercultural competence.** Some literary texts are full of cultural references and as Miriam Borham and Luisa M. González defend, the use of literary texts can promote reflection on cultural differences, develop the understanding of the home culture, and consequently enhance more tolerant and open attitudes towards other cultures (108).
- **Literary knowledge.** This term makes reference to the ability to use literary notions in order to interpret the text together with the ability to produce a personal response (“Literary knowledge” n.p.).

After analyzing the components and factors of both literary and linguistic competence, it can be argued that both components are essential and indivisible when reading and understanding a literary text.

Literary competence must in many ways depend on linguistic competence one could not imagine appreciation of literary texts without appreciation of the language in which they are constructed (Spiro 32).

1.3. Literature and its relation with the four basic skills

As it has been stated before, the exploitation of a literary text can contribute to the development and improvement of the four basic skills in which the learning of a foreign language is based. Here, I will carry out a more detailed analysis of the contributions of literature to each skill.

1.3.1. Reading

Reading is the key for the development of communicative skills and a primary source for a correct writing; moreover, “becoming engaged with a piece of literature will certainly increase students’ interests in reading often and widely in English” (Mckay 326).

1.3.2. Writing

Among other benefits, literature in the field of writing can be used as a resource for a creative writing, to support opinions with relevant information or to justify conclusions (Mckay 328).

1.3.3. Listening

Listening is an essential skill to achieve oral proficiency. Nowadays many literary texts have been transformed into movies. In addition, depending on the literary text chosen it is not difficult to find a video or a recording which contributes to develop the students’ listening abilities. According to Sandra Mckey, “one clear advantage of encouraging students to listen to literature read by professional is that such material exposes students to a variety of dialects and voice qualities” (326).

1.3.4. Speaking

Related to the personal involvement and the different interpretations each reader gets from a text, it is easy to provoke a discussion aimed at expanding the oral communicative skills of the students.

1.4. Literary approaches: different methods used to teaching literature

The methodology used for the teaching of literature goes from the use of literature as a subject to the use of literature as a resource for the teaching of diverse aspects of the language itself. Therefore, first of all, before selecting a text we must bear in mind the purpose of the lesson: what do I want to teach my students? In her book *Literature and Language Teaching*, Gillian Lazar (23-24) distinguishes three different approaches to the use of literature:

a. Language-based approach. It consists in a detailed analysis of the language of the text. This will help students make meaningful interpretations of the literary text. This approach highlights that the materials are chosen according to the way they illustrate specific features of the language used in the text.

b. Literature as content. Within this method, literature itself is the content of the course. Thus, texts are selected due to their importance as part of a literary canon.

c. Literature for personal enrichment. Literature is considered to be a useful tool for encouraging students to draw on their own personal feelings, opinions, etc. Therefore, materials are chosen according to the students' interests in an attempt to motivate them.

Since this is not a course on literature and the aim is to broaden the students' competence in the foreign language in general, and bearing in mind the group of students we are dealing with, the most suitable option will be a combination of the three approaches.

In order to allow for literary education in its specific sense a double route could be taken: institutional learning should develop reading literacy so that students are capable of reading literary texts among others. It should besides offer opportunities of

participating in cultural life and of experiencing literature as personally relevant (Pieper 13).

1.5. Selection of literary texts: What type of literature is suitable?

When selecting texts and designing materials or activities there are many different aspects to tackle; however, all of them must bear in mind the type of students to which the text is addressed. Now, some of the most relevant aspects regarding the suitability of contents will be analyzed:

a. Motivation. Principally the text must be interesting and attractive to the students: “The enjoyment of the literary text [...] can itself be an incentive to overcome some of the linguistic or cultural barriers in the text [...]” (Carter and Long 6).

b. Legibility. The text and the reader have to share the same level, Carter and Long (5) indicate that “it is better to choose literary texts which are not too far beyond the student’s normal reading comprehension”. Similarly, Jennifer Hill (15) points out that “it is a mistake to give adolescents material more suited to a younger child just because the language is simpler”.

c. Previous knowledge is an essential requirement during the process of reading because it helps the reader solve problems within the text because if students identify themselves with the experiences and situations presented in the text, they will enjoy the reading making the text their own (Carter and Long 5-6).

Now, when regarding the type of text that we will work with, aspects such as the use of authentic materials, the use of contemporary or classical literature and the exploitation of one genre or another should be considered.

d. Use of authentic or simplified material. Graded texts that are commercially available could be a good source in lower levels. On the other hand, the real text would

be a more suitable option in higher levels since the language used in it is authentic and therefore it possesses the original literary language: “In reading literary texts, students have also to cope with language intended for native speakers and thus they gain additional familiarity with many different linguistic uses, forms and conventions of the written mode [...]” (Collie and Slater 6).

e. Classics or contemporary literature. Regarding the suitability of contents, we have to bear in mind that the language used by some authors is more difficult to understand than the language used by others. For example, Shakespeare’s language would be far beyond our students’ competence and needs: “Thus, [...] the easiest texts to use and adapt belong to the nineteenth and twentieth century [...] since the language in it will probably be closer to everyday language [...]” (Fernández and Montero 145).

f. Different genres and different benefits from each one. Poetry and drama could be very useful in activities of dramatization or role-plays, where the students have the opportunity to improve, among other skills, their pronunciation. However, depending on the poem or the play, the language used in it could imply a serious problem to the students.

On the contrary, **short stories and novels** can be the most suitable option. Although they share a great number of features in common, one of the main differences between the short story and the novel is length. Novels are usually more complex and because of their length they should be used over a long period of time. However, short stories are more adequate since they are shorter and they can be analyzed just in a few sessions. Moreover, their basic characteristics, such as the limited number of characters, the existence of just one plot and the single setting, transform short stories in the most suitable genre to use.

g. Possible difficulties in a text. As I have stated before, the difficulties contained in the literary text must be considered and explained in advance when they prevent the understanding of the text. The most significant complications deal with: cultural problems, linguistic problems such as grammar, syntax, etc. and difficulties in vocabulary. Nevertheless, if all these potential drawbacks are explained in advance, they can be transformed into a positive experience for the learners. As Brumfit and Carter defend “we [must] simply create the conditions for successful learning” (23).

1.6. Division of activities

According to the three literary approaches aforementioned, I will design some activities which will be divided in pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities and will involve learners in the process of learning. The first two groups (pre-reading and while-reading activities) are designed to help students with the possible difficulties present on the text, by means of:

- Raising awareness of the theme or themes.
- Relating the literary topics to the students’ experience.
- Introducing relevant vocabulary and elements that will improve their comprehension of the story, but also helping them to discriminate those words which do not transmit significant information.

Finally, post-reading activities, where literature itself is the content, will be introduced.

a. Pre-reading activities: all the activities present in this group are aimed at creating or activating the reader’s previous knowledge by introducing new concepts such as new vocabulary, cultural aspects, etc. In addition, they are

planned to enhance the reader's motivation. In other words, their purpose is to focus the reader's attention on the text.

b. While-reading activities are those activities that readers or students make while they interact with the text. They aim at helping the students with understanding the plot.

c. Post-reading activities are those activities intended to store the knowledge acquired (Karakas qtd. in Zenotz 44). Within this group of activities students are required to use all the concepts they have learnt in previous activities to express their opinions.

As in the selection of the literary text, the tasks or activities must be adapted to match the linguistic and literary level of the learners, because it is the task which makes a text accessible (Spiro 37).

2. Practical application

Classroom context

In order to accomplish this research I have had the opportunity to work with a group of students from the IES Julian Marías in Valladolid. In particular, the sample corresponds with a group of students of 1ºBACH between 16 and 17 years old. In general, students have a good level of English; even some of them have the C1 certificate. Consequently, their competence in the foreign language is adequate to put the activities proposed in practice.

Instruments

Taking into account the studies which have been discussed in the first part of this MA dissertation, a set of activities have been designed aimed at enhancing the overall knowledge of the English language through the use of a literary text. After that, these activities will be analyzed trying to prove whether they are useful or not.

Why Jack London's short story *To Build a Fire*?

After analyzing the literature on the use of literary texts in the teaching of a foreign language and the particular features of the participants, it was concluded that the short story *To Build a Fire* written by Jack London in 1908 could be a suitable option for the development of the activities mentioned before.

First of all, the text is a short story whose length is adequate for our purposes and the language used is not very difficult although the possible complications will be considered in advance to facilitate the task. Moreover, the plot itself is interesting enough to catch the attention of the students and to stimulate a response towards it. The

interpretation of the text based on its resemblances to the tarot cards is an excellent way to explain the text from a different perspective that may be attractive to the students. My intention was to show the students that there is something more behind the text, and that reading literature does not consist in the regular questions usually aimed to test them (see appendix IV, pages 47-55).

At this respect, a Power Point presentation based on the interpretation done by José Manuel Barrio Marco (27-48) in the book *Estudios de filología inglesa: Homenaje al profesor José María Ruiz Ruiz*, has been designed in order to explain the students the sources in which the short story is based.

2.1. Activities proposed

Since the first goal is to achieve the comprehension of the text, the activities proposed in the first two sections (pre-reading and while-reading activities) are aimed at reaching the understanding of the literary text. Secondly, the last group of activities (post-reading activities) is destined to develop the student's knowledge from a literary perspective. Hence, literature itself would be the content of this group of activities.

“It is self-evident that exposure to literary texts will increase sensitivity to language [...] however [...] students need guidance in their *interaction with the texts*” (McRae and Boardman 4).

2.1.1. Pre-reading activities

First activity. Using the title of the text, I would ask the students to reflect on the plot of the short story. Once the students have suggested possible answers, I would explain them what the book is about, in an attempt to activate their previous knowledge (see appendix I, page 33).

Second activity. It has been designed to increase the students' knowledge about the text they are going to read. Within the context of survival in extreme cold temperatures, students should classify the sentences provided as true or false (see appendix I, page 33).

Third activity. The pictures presented in this activity are considered to be a visual strategy used to guide the students towards the topic they are going to read, and thus creating expectations about the plot (see appendix I, page 34).

In the fourth activity different beginnings and endings have been provided and students must join the beginning and ending of each particular text. The purpose is to make readers aware of the stylistic similarities and other correspondences that characterize a particular text. After that, students must identify which text is the one they are going to read (see appendix I, pages 35-37).

Activity number five makes reference to a specific reading strategy by which readers must identify the meaning of a word thanks to the context. In this way, some words have been highlighted and two possible definitions provided. Students are required to choose the correct definition using the context (see appendix I, page 38).

Activity number six is very similar to the previous one since students have to match the words from the text and the images provided (see appendix I, page 39-40).

2.1.2. While-reading activities

The first activity is a listening exercise in which a recording of the story would provide the missing words needed in order to complete a fragment from the story (see appendix II, page 41).

Activity number two consists in working with complex sentences extracted from the text and simplified sentences extracted from the recording (used in the previous activity), where the students must identify the pair of sentences with the same meaning.

The main purpose is to make students aware of the art of rephrasing since they do not have enough competence in the English language to rephrase sentences by themselves (see appendix II, pages 41-42).

Finally, in activity number three students have to classify the words provided in their appropriate space (see appendix II, page 42).

2.1.3. Post-reading activities

In this last section, literature itself is the content.

After completing the activities aimed at the understanding of the text, I will finish the practice with an activity whose main goal is to promote communication in the foreign language. First of all, I will provide students with an interpretation of the text based on the resemblances of the characters with tarot cards showing them one of the possible sources used by the author to create the story. Later on, a few questions will be presented so as to create a debate in which students may express their own point of view. My main purpose would be to stimulate a critical response to the literary text.

Having all these aspects in mind, the following activities were designed:

In the first activity students are required to re-order some fragments extracted from the text in their chronological order as a way of testing their understanding of the story (see appendix III, page 44).

The second activity is based on the alteration of certain elements which students have to replace with the correct element that appears in the text (see appendix III, pages 44-45).

The third activity promotes creative writing since students must write a possible dialogue between the two characters of the story from a fragment which has no dialogue (see appendix III, page 45-46).

Activity number four consists in a matching exercise in which students have to match each character to the word that describes them (see appendix III, page 46).

The last activity proposed consists in a few questions aimed at creating a debate in which all students must participate. These questions do not have to be directly connected with the text (see appendix III, page 46).

2.2. Analysis and interpretation of results

Once students completed all the activities proposed, I analyzed the results and the impressions about each activity:

Pre-reading activities:

- In the first activity, students were compelled to ask two questions. The first one was related to the content of the story, but nobody was able to expand the meaning of the story beyond the title. In relation to the second one, the ninety per cent of the students considered that the story would be boring.
- Activity number two did not present any difficulty because they had some knowledge about how to survive in cold temperatures and all of them were able to complete the activity. They even learned some new words such as “frostbitten” or “tissue”.
- Activity number three: after the presentation of some images associated to the topic of text, the students noticed some aspects related to the story and they were able to guess part of its plot: “a man who is lost in the snow with his dog and wants to make a fire to keep him warm from cold temperatures”.
- Activity number four was fully accomplished without any difficulty. All the students were able to match the beginnings to their corresponding endings

noticing the elements that allowed them to make the suitable correspondence.

Needless to say, all of them identified the text they had to read.

- In activity number five students were required to choose the correct definition among the ones provided. Even though the majority of the students were able to fulfill the activity, some of them were totally dependent on a translation into their mother tongue to understand the words.
- In the last activity proposed within this pre-reading section students had to match the words to the pictures which represented their meaning and most of the students accomplished the activity without any particular difficulty.

While-reading activities

- The first activity based on a listening exercise was very successful. All the participants were able to complete the gaps and there was no necessity to play the tape record a second time.
- The second activity obtained a fantastic result and the students noticed the advantages of re-phrasing in order to provide the same meaning with different words.
- Activities number three and four did not present any difficulty and were completed satisfactorily.

Post-reading activities

- The first and second activities within this final section were completed satisfactorily.
- The third activity, which consisted in writing a dialogue, was one of the most successful activities since students enjoyed it very much. They were divided into

five groups, and each group had to create a dialogue based on an extract from the text. The dialogues were very funny and imaginative, and thus, the creative writing was fully accomplished (see appendix V, pages 56-58).

- The fourth activity did not present any difficulty and students matched the words to the characters according to the impressions they got from the text.
- Finally, activity five was completed after I explained them some of the motifs and themes of the story with the help of the Power Point presentation. They really enjoyed the presentation because they did not expect it. At the beginning, they did not find any relation between the characters of the story and the tarot cards, but, after the explanation, all of them discovered a new way of reading the story. Therefore, the questions proposed in this activity provoked an interesting conversation among them, although in some cases they made use of their mother tongue to express their opinions.

3. Concluding remarks

This MA dissertation has been concerned with the possible contributions of literature as one of the key elements in the acquisition of a foreign language. According to the results, it can be determined that most of the activities proposed achieved their purpose by developing different strategies aimed at the acquisition of English through literary materials. However, this analysis of the activities shows that the students did not respond to other activities as expected and several difficulties arose, such as the dependence that readers have on their mother tongue to understand and infer meaning and, above all, to communicate their opinions. Therefore, the most remarkable drawback in most of the activities was the reticence showed by the vast majority of the students to use the English language to express their views and opinions. However, all of them were eager to participate and talk among themselves in Spanish, but they remained silent when they were asked to share their views with the rest of the class in English. Although it was carried out in Spanish, one of the most remarkable discussions took place around the central figure of the narrative and whether the *chechaquo* deserved to die or not.

During the last session, students were asked about their impressions of the story and the activities accomplished. All of them agreed on the motivational aspect of the task and, above all, they remarked that they enjoyed the Power Point presentation very much and the activities connected with the interpretation of the story. Nevertheless, most of the students suggested reducing the number of activities aimed at the understanding of the text in favor of other activities such as the creative writing. After the suggestion, I realized they were probably right since once you have got the general meaning of the text, those activities related to vocabulary or paraphrasing seem to be not very useful and perhaps not that exciting. Although this is an issue which has

received a great deal of attention, there are still some aspects that require further analysis and consideration, such as the possibility of enhancing the communicative competence through the use of literary texts, since as it has been proved, the students still have problems when communicating in English in class activities. As Medina (93) points out, “teachers should emphasize the importance of using the foreign language for classroom communication so that the learners can get used to speak in English during the lessons”.

In spite of the isolated cases mentioned above, the rest of the activities achieved their purpose showing that literary texts can be effectively used and are an excellent resource within the process of acquisition of English as a second language in Secondary Education. It should be remarked that choosing the short story *To Build a Fire* was a successful decision since it has been a highly motivating story whose interpretation, based on the tarot cards, enabled the students to see and value a literary text in a different way.

In conclusion, the use of literary texts as a resource in the process of acquisition of a foreign language has proved to be an interesting or motivating way of learning and the current availability of texts nowadays provide teachers innumerable options to work with literature in many different ways, which truly contribute to enhancing overall knowledge of English and to promote reading skills in general.

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Appendices

Appendix I

Pre-reading activities

1. The title of the story we are going to read is *To Build a Fire*.

- What do you expect to read?
- Are we dealing with a funny or a boring story?

2. Survival instinct. Classify these sentences as true (T) or false (F).

<http://adventure.howstuffworks.com/survive-night-alaska1.htm>

When living in really cold temperatures....

1. It is essential to keep your body covered and warm.
2. Our body loses heat most rapidly from our head, neck, wrists and ankles.
3. Snow structures, such as igloos or snow caves, will prove surprisingly warm compared to outside.
4. It is recommended to apply a heat source to frostbitten skin.
5. In frigid temperatures, staying dry is a must to defend you from frostbite, hypothermia and other cold weather nemeses.
6. Use hot water or a heating lamp to warm the person.
7. In many parts of the body, blood vessels in our skin tissue constrict, or tighten up. This tightening helps keeps blood away from the cold outer layer of the body.

3. The following images represent some of the contents present on the short story.



1



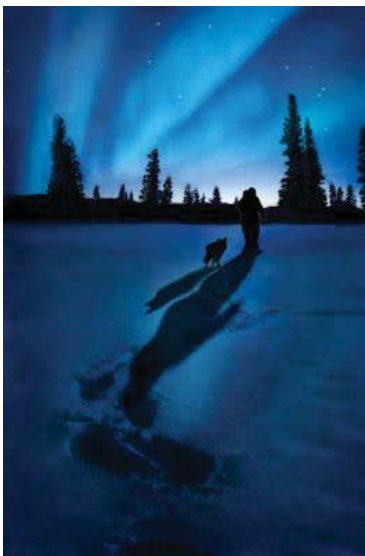
2



3



4



5

- What do you expect to read after seeing the images?

1. (Source: <http://www.cumbreros.com/index.php/interes-general/127-hipotermia-y-congelamiento>)

2. (Source: <http://www.jacklondon.net/buildafire.html>)

3. (Source: <http://dhakalpr.blogspot.com.es/2012/05/i-would-rather-be-ashes-than-dust-i.html>)

4. (Source: <http://pixabay.com/es/fuego-hoguera-llama-quemar-ascuas-3311/>)

5. (Source: <http://dhakalpr.blogspot.com.es/2012/05/i-would-rather-be-ashes-than-dust-i.html>)

4. Match the beginnings and endings.

a. One sunny autumn afternoon a child strayed away from its rude home in a small field and entered a forest unobserved. It was happy in a new sense of freedom from control, happy in the opportunity of exploration and adventure; for this child's spirit, in bodies of its ancestors, had for thousands of years been trained to memorable feats of discovery and conquest--victories in battles whose critical moments were centuries, whose victors' camps were cities of hewn stone. From the cradle of its race it had conquered its way through two continents and passing a great sea had penetrated a third, there to be born to war and dominion as a heritage.

b. It is very seldom that mere ordinary people like John and myself secure ancestral halls for the summer.

A colonial mansion, a hereditary estate, I would say a haunted house, and reach the height of romantic felicity--but that would be asking too much of fate!

Still I will proudly declare that there is something queer about it.

Else, why should it be let so cheaply? And why have stood so long untenanted?

John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage.

c. High above the city, on a tall column, stood the statue of the Happy Prince. He was gilded all over with thin leaves of fine gold, for eyes he had two bright sapphires, and a large red ruby glowed on his sword-hilt.

d. TRUE! --nervous --very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses --not destroyed --not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily --how calmly I can tell you the whole story.

e. Day had broken cold and gray, exceedingly cold and gray, when the man turned aside from the main Yukon trail and climbed the high earth-bank, where a dim and little-travelled trail led eastward through the fat spruce timberland. It was a steep bank, and he paused for breath at the top, excusing the act to himself by looking at his watch. It was nine o'clock. There was no sun nor hint of sun, though there was not a cloud in the sky. It was a clear day, and yet there seemed an intangible pall over the face of things, a subtle gloom that made the day dark, and that was due to the absence of sun. This fact did not worry the man. He was used to the lack of sun. It had been days since he had seen the sun, and he knew that a few more days must pass before that cheerful orb, due south, would just peep above the sky-line and dip immediately from view.

1. The child moved his little hands, making wild, uncertain gestures. He uttered a series of inarticulate and indescribable cries--something between the chattering of an ape and the gobbling of a turkey--a startling, soulless, unholy sound, the language of a devil. The child was a deaf mute. Then he stood motionless, with quivering lips, looking down upon the wreck.

2. But the man remained silent. Later, the dog whined loudly. And still later it crept close to the man and caught the scent of death. This made the animal bristle and back away. A little longer it delayed, howling under the stars that leaped and danced and shone brightly in the cold sky. Then it turned and trotted up the trail in the direction of the camp it knew, where were the other food-providers and fire-providers.

3. And then I said it again, several times, very gently and slowly, and said it so often that he had to go and see, and he got it of course, and came in. He stopped short by the door.

"What is the matter?" he cried. "For God's sake, what are you doing!"

I kept on creeping just the same, but I looked at him over my shoulder.

"I've got out at last," said I, "in spite of you and Jane. And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!"

Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time!

4. 'You have rightly chosen,' said God, 'for in my garden of Paradise this little bird shall sing for evermore, and in my city of gold the Happy Prince shall praise me.'

5. [...] It grew louder --louder --louder! And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God! --no, no! They heard! --they suspected! --they knew! --they were making a mockery of my horror!-this I thought, and this I think. But anything was better than this agony! Anything was more tolerable than this derision! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die! and now --again! --hark! louder! louder! louder! louder! [...]

Source: <http://www.online-literature.com/bierce/992/>

Source: <http://www.eastoftheweb.com/short-stories/UBooks/HapPri.shtml>

Source: <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/poe/telltale.html>

Source: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1952/1952-h/1952-h.htm>

Source: <http://www.jacklondon.net/buildafire.html>

- Which text corresponds with the one we are going to read?

5. Deduce the meaning of the following words.

The sight of the dog put a wild idea into his head. He remembered the tale of the man, caught in a **blizzard**, who killed a **steer** and **crawled** inside the **carcass**, and so was saved. He would kill the dog and bury his hands in the warm body until the **numbness** went out of them. Then he could build another fire. He spoke to the dog, calling it to him; but in his voice was a strange note of fear that frightened the animal, who had never known the man to speak in such way before.

Numbness:

- a. Too many to be counted; countless.
- b. Deprived of the power to feel or move normally.

Steer:

- a. A young ox, especially one castrated before sexual maturity and raised for beef.
- b. To guide by means of a device such as a rudder, paddle, or wheel.

Blizzard:

- a. Powerful brownish-yellow bear of the uplands of western North America.
- b. A storm with dry, driving snow, strong winds, and intense cold.

Carcass:

- a. The dead body of an animal, especially one slaughtered for food.
- b. An unfinished skeleton or framework, as of a house or ship.

Crawled:

- a. To move slowly on the hands and knees or by dragging the body along the ground; creep.
- b. Annoyingly unpleasant; repulsive.

6. Match the words and the images. Use the context.

The old-timer on Sulphur Creek was right, he thought in the moment of controlled despair that ensued: after **fifty below**, a man should travel with a partner. He **beat** his hands, but failed in exciting any sensation. Suddenly he bared both hands, removing the **mittens** with his teeth. He caught the whole bunch between **the heels of his hands**. His arm-muscles not being frozen enabled him to press the hand-heels tightly against the matches. Then he scratched the bunch along his leg. It flared into flame, seventy sulphur matches at once! There was no wind to blow them out. He kept his head to one side to escape the strangling fumes, and held the **blazing bunch** to the **birch-bark**. As he so held it, he became aware of sensation in his hand. His flesh was burning. He could smell it. Deep down below the surface he could feel it. The sensation developed into pain that grew acute. And still he endured it, holding the flame of the matches clumsily to the bark that would not light readily because his own burning hands were in the way, absorbing most of the flame.



1



2



3



4



5



6

1. (Source: <http://www.istockphoto.com/stock-photo-8910255-frozen-thermometer.php>)
2. (Source: <http://devenluca.wordpress.com/2013/05/09/give-yourself-a-round-of-applause/>)
3. (Source: <http://www.weefriends.net/2013/12/30/mittens-vs-gloves-for-children/>)
4. (Source: <http://www.larrycitrphoto.com/-/larrycitrphoto/gallery.asp?photoID=3596945&cat=49678>)
5. (Source: <https://josamotril.wordpress.com/2013/01/23/los-amantes-cap-25-la-cocina/>)
6. (Source: <http://otramedicina.imujer.com/4676/ejercicios-para-evitar-el-dolor-en-las-munecas>)

Appendix II

While-reading activities

1. Listen and fill in the blanks with the words you hear.

[http://www.manythings.org/voa/stories/To Build a Fire - By Jack London.html](http://www.manythings.org/voa/stories/To_Build_a_Fire_-_By_Jack_London.html)

A half hour later, it happened. At a place where the snow very solid, the ice broke. The man's..... sank into the water. It was not deep, but his legs..... wet to the knees. The man was angry. The accident would delay his arrival at the..... He would have to build a fire now to dry his..... and boots.

He walked over to some small trees. They were covered with snow. In their branches were pieces of dry..... and wood left by flood waters earlier in the year. He put several large pieces of..... on the snow, under one of the trees. On top of the wood, he put some grass and dry branches. He pulled off his....., took out his matches, and lighted the fire. He fed the young flame with more wood. As the fire stronger, he gave it larger pieces of wood.

He worked slowly and carefully. At sixty degrees..... zero, a man with wet feet must not fail in his first to build a fire. While he was walking, his blood had kept all parts of his body..... Now that he had stopped, cold was forcing his..... to withdraw deeper into his body. His wet feet had frozen. He could not feel his fingers. His nose was frozen, too. The..... all over his body felt cold.

2. Match the phrases with the same meaning.

1. At the man's heels trotted a dog, a big native husky, the proper wolf-dog, gray-coated and without any visible or temperamental difference from its

brother, the wild wolf. The animal was depressed by the tremendous cold. It knew that it was no time for travelling.

2. At a place where there were no signs, where the soft, unbroken snow seemed to advertise solidity beneath, the man broke through. It was not deep. He wet himself halfway to the knees before he floundered out to the firm crust.

3. As he so held it, he became aware of sensation in his hand. His flesh was burning. He could smell it. [...] The sensation developed into pain that grew acute. [...] At last, when he could endure no more, he jerked his hands apart. The blazing matches fell sizzling into the snow.

a. At a place where the snow seemed very solid, the ice broke. The man's feet sank into the water. It was not deep, but his legs got wet to the knees.

b. He held the blazing matches to a piece of wood. After a while, he became aware that he could smell his hands burning. Then he began to feel the pain. He opened his hands, and the blazing matches fell on to the snow. The flame went out in a puff of gray smoke.

c. A dog walked behind the man. It was a big gray animal, half dog and half wolf. The dog did not like the extreme cold. It knew the weather was too cold to travel.

3. Fill in the gaps with the appropriate word or phrase. Use the word from the chart.

Had	Off
Sat	Die
Head	Sleep
Thought	Death

When he.....recovered his breath and control, he.....up and entertained in his mind the conception of meeting.....with dignity. However, the conception did not

come to him in such terms. His idea of it was that he had been making a fool of himself, running around like a chicken with its..... cut—such was the simile that occurred to him. Well, he was bound to freeze anyway, and he might as well take it decently. With this new-found peace of mind came the first glimmerings of drowsiness. A good idea, he thought, to off to death. It was like taking an anaesthetic. Freezing was not so bad as people..... There were lots worse ways to.....

Appendix III

Post-reading activities

1. Jigsaw reading: unscramble the text.

There were no signs of a fire to be made, and, besides, never in the dog's experience had it known a man to sit like that in the snow and make no fire [...] Later, the dog whined loudly. And still later it crept close to the man and caught the scent of death. This made the animal bristle and back away.

And it knew that it was not good to walk abroad in such fearful cold. It was the time to lie snug in a hole in the snow and wait for a curtain of cloud to be drawn across the face of outer space whence this cold came.

Then it turned and trotted up the trail in the direction of the camp it knew, where were the other food-providers and fire-providers.

Suddenly it broke through, floundered to one side, and got away to firmer footing. It had wet its forefeet and legs, and almost immediately the water that clung to it turned to ice. It made quick efforts to lick the ice off its legs, then dropped down in the snow and began to bite out the ice that had formed between the toes. This was a matter of instinct. To permit the ice to remain would mean sore feet. It did not know this. It merely obeyed the mysterious prompting that arose from the deep crypts of its being.

2. Correct the sentences by replacing the words in bold. Use the word that appears in the text. Try to remember the words that appear in the text.

1. His idea of it was that he had been making a fool of himself, running around like a **cow** with its head cut off—such was the simile that occurred to him.

2. At the very least it meant delay, for he would be forced to stop and build a fire, and under its protection to bare his feet while he dried his socks and **high-heel shoes**.

3. He looked at his **mobile phone**. It was ten o'clock.

4. He could not bring his **feet** together to pull them out, but he was able to gather them by the handful.

3. Write a possible dialogue between the man and the dog from this passage which has no dialogue.

The man sat up in the snow for a moment and struggled for calmness. Then he pulled on his mittens, by means of his teeth, and got upon his feet. He glanced down at first in order to assure himself that he was really standing up, for the absence of sensation in his feet left him unrelated to the earth. His erect position in itself started to drive the webs of suspicion from the dog's mind; and when he spoke peremptorily, with the sound of whip-lashes in his voice, the dog rendered its customary allegiance and came to him. As it came within reaching distance, the man lost his control. His arms flashed out to the dog, and he experienced genuine surprise when he discovered that his hands could not clutch, that there was neither bend nor feeling in the fingers. He had forgotten for the moment that they were frozen and that they were freezing more and more. All this happened quickly, and before the animal could get away, he encircled its body with his arms. He sat down in the snow, and in this fashion held the dog, while it snarled and whined and struggled.

But it was all he could do, hold its body encircled in his arms and sit there. He realized that he could not kill the dog. There was no way to do it. With his helpless hands he could neither draw nor hold his sheath-knife nor throttle the animal. He released it, and

it plunged wildly away, with tail between its legs, and still snarling. It halted forty feet away and surveyed him curiously, with ears sharply pricked forward.

4. From the list below choose the most adequate words for describing the three characters of the story.

Intelligent	Brutality	Instinct	Wisdom
Knowledge	Irresponsibility	Unconsciousness	

5. Comment on the questions below:

- Who do you think is the main character of the story?
- What does the dog represent?
- What does the man represent?
- The man in the story knows he is going to die. What would you do in his situation?
- Do you agree with the similarity between the real characters of the story and the ones provided by the tarot cards?

Appendix IV

Power point presentation

American Naturalism

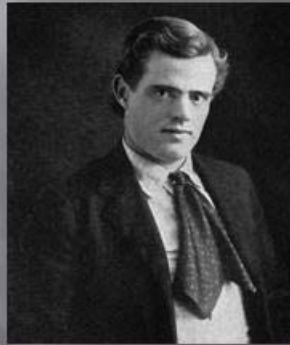


American Naturalism

Characteristics

- ▣ Pessimism.
- ▣ Men against Nature: human beings have nothing to do against Nature.
- ▣ Instinct means knowledge.
- ▣ The character is in a quest, looking for his own identity, looking for knowledge.

Jack London



White Fang



To Build a Fire



BEHIND THE TEXT

Landscape: white wilderness

- ▣ Extreme temperatures (fifty degrees below zero)
- ▣ Uninhabited area
- ▣ Nothing moves
- ▣ There is no life
- ▣ There are no animals

Characters

- ▣ The fool
- ▣ The Hermit
- ▣ The Moon



THE FOOL



Physical appearance

- He has an amber beard:
 - “the man was chewing tobacco [...] The result was that a crystal beard of the color and solidity of amber was increasing its length on his chin”.

- He is followed by a dog:
 - “At the man's heels trotted a dog”.

The *chechaquo* is represented by the Fool:

- Unconsciousness:
 - “Fifty degrees below zero meant eighty-odd degrees of frost. Such fact impressed him as being cold and uncomfortable, and that was all. It did not lead him to meditate upon his frailty as a creature of temperature, and upon man's frailty in general [...]”.

The *chechaquo* is represented by the Fool:

- ▣ Irresponsibility:
 - “High up in the tree one bough capsized its load of snow. This fell on the boughs beneath, capsizing them. [...] It grew like an avalanche, and it descended without warning upon the man and the fire, and the fire was blotted out! Where it had burned was a mantle of fresh and disordered snow.

The *chechaquo* is represented by the Fool:

- ▣ Brutality:
 - “The sight of the dog put a wild idea into his head. He remembered the tale of the man, caught in a blizzard, who killed a steer and crawled inside the carcass, and so was saved. He would kill the dog and bury his hands in the warm body until the numbness went out of them”.

THE MOON



The dog is represented by the Moon:

- Dog - God
- Intelligent
- Intuitive
- The dog has instinct and instinct represents knowledge
- The dog is the contrary of the fool
- The dog is the survivor

The dog is represented by the Moon:

- Intelligent:
 - “The dog had learned fire, and it wanted fire, or else to burrow under the snow and cuddle its warmth away from the air”.

- Instinctive and intuitive:
 - “Possibly in its brain there was no sharp consciousness of a condition of very cold such as was in the man's brain. But the brute had its instinct”.

- ▣ “[...] he compelled the dog to go on in front. **The dog did not want to go.** [...] Suddenly it broke [...] and got away to firmer footing. It had wet its forefeet and legs, and almost immediately the water that clung to it turned to ice. It made quick efforts to lick the ice off its legs, then dropped down in the snow and began to bite out the ice that had formed between the toes. **This was a matter of instinct**”.

THE HERMIT



The Old-Timer of Sulphur Creek is represented by the Hermit:

- ▣ The protector of travellers
- ▣ He represents the absolute wisdom:
 - “The old-timer had been very serious in laying down the law that no man must travel alone in the Klondike after fifty below”.

The Old-Timer of Sulphur Creek is represented by the Hermit:

- As time passes the *chechaquo* realizes the old-timer was right:
 - “The old-timer on Sulphur Creek was right, he thought in the moment of controlled despair that ensued: after fifty below, a man should travel with a partner”.

Astral projection



Astral projection

- “He pictured the boys finding his body next day. Suddenly he found himself with them, coming along the trail and looking for himself. And, still with them, he came around a turn in the trail and found himself lying in the snow. He did not belong with himself any more, for even then he was out of himself, standing with the boys and looking at himself in the snow [...]”.

The achievement of Knowledge

- Finally, the man realizes the old-timer of Sulphur Creek was right:

"You were right, old hoss; you were right," the man mumbled to the old-timer of Sulphur Creek.

The achievement of Knowledge

- He understands his errors, accepts death and acquires knowledge through experience.
 - "[...] His idea of it was that he had been making a fool of himself".
 - "[...] he sat up and entertained in his mind the conception of **meeting death with dignity** [...] freezing was not so bad as people thought. There were lots worse ways to die".

Appendix V

Dialogues

Group 1

M: Toby come here right now!

D: I am not Toby stupid man! I am Cocco!

M: I do not care about your name, I am going to kill you!

D: ha ha ha! Try to catch me! (and the dog started to run).

M: Come back here stupid animal!

D: Are you calling me stupid? Because I am going to tell you something I know how to survive in cold temperatures...

M: What do you know?

D: I know where the camp is, it is very near here...

M: tell me where!

D: which is the magic word?

M: now?

D: oh! I will give you another opportunity.

M: ok, ok, you win! Please tell me where the camp is.

D: I will do it, but I want something... a want a female dog.

Group 2

D: how do you dare to touch me, stupid human?

M: I want to kill you.

D: Try it again and I will rip your head off!

M: It is the only option for me to survive

D: Why do not you try to make a fire, you good-for-nothing!

M: I cannot move my hands, I am really cold. I need to kill you first and your blood will warm me up.

D: we can talk and find a solution

M: there is no other solution I have to kill you.

D: ok! Try to do it.

(The man and the dog start to fight and the man dies)

D: I told you man, do not play with me. I am the real survivor!

Group 3

D: Why are you looking at me this way?

M: I am near to die.

D: That is your problem, you have to make a fire...

M: But I cannot. I cannot feel my hands! Could you do it for me?

D: yes! Sure! Give me the matches.

(The dog makes a fire)

M: Oh my God! Thank you very much, you have saved my life

D: Do not worry man, I will take care of you and then I will lead you to the camp.

Group 4

M: Come here boy!

D: what do you want?

M: I just want to hug you...

D: hug me? Are you serious?

M: I am telling you to come!

D: I am afraid of you, and I do not know why you are looking at me like that way.

M: You are warm and I am cold and if you hug me, I will get better.

D: Really? Is that the only thing you want?

M: Yes, it is. Please! Come here! People say you are the man's best friend. You have to help me!

D: I cannot believe you! You have tried to kill me, you have been very rude and I have feelings!

M: I am sorry!

D: I am sorry to, but I am not going to help you. You deserve to die.

Group 5

D: Why are you staring at me?

M: I am in love with you. Come here, I want to kiss you!

D: Are you kidding me? I know you very well.

M: I am not lying, come here and give me a big hug!

D: I know you want to kill me. If you try it I will bite you!

M: (the man crying) Ok, then, leave me alone. You do not love me...

D: Ok fine, good bye!