The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore

Short Story Module

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Classroom Context

These activities are written for an intermediate middle school EFL class in Thailand. English is a requirement in Thai schools beginning in primary school. They have mostly focused on vocabulary acquisition and grammar. Students have daily English classes with a native Thai teacher. Twice a week for one hour each day, students receive instruction from a native English speaker. These classes are meant to help them integrate the skills they have been learning and use English fluently in authentic settings. While both fluency and accuracy are crucial to learning English (Brown, 2007, p. 324), because their other English classes focus so heavily on accuracy, my class is structured to help students develop fluency in their language skills.

Theme and Rational

Reading literature in the classroom is not only meant to increase skills and knowledge of the L2, but to involve the reader in direct experience (Gajdusek, 1988, p. 229). Using literature in the classroom gives L2 learners a rich language experience, exposes them to aspects of language that can only be learned through repeated exposure, and generates intrinsic motivation to read further in the L2 (Hedgcock and Ferris, 2009, p. 250). Using The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore (Appendix A), I will design activities to provide intermediate learners with a rich language experience and expose them to the joy of reading. This text is perfect for these goals as the main theme of the book is the joy of reading. In addition, this book has a fourth grade reading level according to Felsch-Kincaid and a reading ease score of 82.

While many teachers view using authentic literature in an L2 classroom as too difficult or not appropriate, many L2 learners like reading literature and find it enjoyable (Hedgcock and Ferris, p. 251). Middle school students in the middle of developing language skills can gain fluency from reading age and skill appropriate literature, benefit from early exposure to literature
to cement a joy of reading while they are young, and gain confidence in their developing language skills, which helps them to enjoy the learning process.

Since one of the course objectives is to increase fluency, building on their foundation of accuracy from previous classes, literature is an appropriate choice to use to increase fluency in all skill levels.

This module is part of a focus on types of stories. Students learned the parts to a story and how to use the story graphic organizer in a previous module. The first lesson in the module introduces the types of stories - modern fiction, historical fiction, fantasy, non-fiction, biographies, and poetry. We will be having a focused module on each story type. Each story type will include a formal assessment (quiz). Following all story type modules, the class project will be completed and the students will take the final assessment (test). This book begins the focus on story types, but is not part of our specific book type study. The book has been included to highlight the adventures that reading can take us on and the joy found in reading.

**Pre-Reading Activities**

**Story Genres** (First Class)

The story genre lesson serves as a pre-reading lesson for all story type modules. The knowledge learned through this lesson will allow students to have pleasurable involvement and understanding throughout the reading process (Gajdusek, 1988, pg. 234). In this lesson, I will teach the basic characteristics of each story type with sample paragraphs from each type. The students will produce six classroom posters that include the name of the story type, the characteristics of the story type, and decorations appropriate to the story type. This will hang in the classroom throughout all story modules.
Vocabulary (Second Lesson)

Because unfamiliar vocabulary can have a negative impact on reading comprehension (p. 235), I have chosen eight vocabulary words to highlight in this module. These eight words were chosen because of their inclusion in the Global Service List (GSL). This list includes 2,000 of the most frequently used words in the English language. Using a list such as the GSL, teachers know where to focus student learning (Hedgcock and Ferris, 2009, p. 300). These highlighted words build on students’ knowledge and are words students will encounter often in authentic conversations and literature. Other words that students may be unfamiliar with students can discern their meaning from the context or occur so infrequently in the English language (like happenstance) that focusing on these words would not be a wise use of class time for this context (p. 295). The vocabulary words are: extraordinary, habit, satisfaction, scatter, seldom, settle, sorrow, and wander.

I will write each of these words on the board. For each word, I will have students sound out the word and then I will use it in a sentence. We will talk about what students think the words mean to help students develop strategies to correctly infer a word’s meaning from the text (p. 295). I will specifically point out the two separate words that make extraordinary. I will use adapted definitions from Merriam-Webster Word Central website for kids and then use the word in a different sentence. Each student will write the word and definition down on a piece of paper. They can then choose a memory strategy such as word cards or word webs to retain this vocabulary (p. 311-313). At the beginning of the year, we used specific strategies, but now I allow students to choose what works best for them.

After I have introduced the vocabulary, I will divide the class in teams and we will play an adapted version of charades. Each student will have a chance to draw one of the vocabulary
words and then either act out the meaning of the word or draw a picture representing the word. Unlike charades, they are encouraged to use English to describe the vocabulary word; they are just not allowed to use the actual vocabulary word. The opposing team will try to guess the word. This allows for informal assessment of how well students understand the concept of each word. Students will also receive a fill-in-the-blanks worksheet (Appendix B) to complete at home.

**Onomatopoeia Words** (Second Class)

*The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore* is filled with onomatopoeias. Some of the onomatopoeias I have identified in the book are *flutter, crinkle, thud,* and *rustle.* While these words are more common in poetry and we will be focusing on them more deeply in that module, they occur enough in this book that I want to highlight them.

I will tell students that in English we have words that sound like their meaning. These words are called onomatopoeias or sound words. We will spend several minutes sounding out onomatopoeia, so students can say it. While I could simply use the term *sound words,* I have chosen to teach them the actual word because students will enjoy sharing this word with friends. In small groups, I will have students brainstorm words they know in Thai that sound like their definition. I will also ask students to make a second list of words they think are onomatopoeias in English. They can look through our classroom books to see if they can find any words to add to their list. We will then discuss the words on their lists and have students share why they think the English word is onomatopoeia. This discussion will establish a framework of words that students will encounter in their reading (Gajdusek, 1988, p. 232) and allow them to discover the words through their reading and not just be told what words they will encounter.
Factual In-Class Work

Reading the Book (Between Second and Third Class)

Brown (2007) says classroom time should never be used for something that can be done outside of class (p. 135). Reading a text such as *The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore* is a good activity for assigned work outside of class. Students can read the story at their own pace and as many times as they need without feeling pressured by the speed of the rest of the class. I will make sure students have a copy of the book, as well as a blank copy of our book report template (Appendix C). Students will be requested to read the book completely through one time. Then, they will read the book through a second time while completing the book report and making a list of the words they think are onomatopoeias. Reading a text multiple times allows students to read for enjoyment and the overall meaning of the story and then to look at the text in more detail to be prepared for discussion and analysis (Gajdusek, 1988, p. 238).

Class Discussion (Third Class)

An effective use of in-class factual work requires that teachers avoid the temptation to cover the story in detail so students can “read” the assignment through the discussion (p. 238). This section of the lesson addresses the questions *who, what, when,* and *where.* To talk about this, we will discuss each part of the book report students completed after reading the story. In the case of *The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore,* many of the answers to these questions are not revealed explicitly in this story.

**Point of view.** Because the concept of literary point of view can be challenging for students of all levels (p. 239), I am choosing not to dwell on this topic because of the level of my students.
Character. I expect to spend significant time in this section. I will make a list on the board of all the characters that students have identified on their paper. While all students should identify Morris as a character and some may identify the flying lady or the little girl as a character, I expect that few students will identify the books as a main character. If no one supplies the books as a character, I will ask students to tell me if the books are a character in the story, specifically Morris’ journal and the Humpty Dumpty book. We will discuss whether or not items that are not typically alive or do not say anything in the story can be main characters. Specifically, we will talk about mainly the Humpty Dumpty book’s interaction with Morris throughout the story. We will also talk about how the story might have been different if that character was missing from the book. As Gajdusek (1988) said, there are not right answers to which characters are main characters (p. 241), but I view both Morris and the Humpty Dumpty book as main characters and the other characters mentioned above as minor characters.

Setting. We will briefly discuss where and when the story takes place. Students should have a fairly easy time agreeing that this story takes place in the present. Then, students can suggest where this story takes place. There are no definitive answers provided in the text.

Action. Looking at the action and the scenes in the story, students can see relationships between events and will help them in the next section of the lesson. I will have students tell me about each thing that happened in the story. If students miss any of the main scenes, I will ask leading questions to help them remember the scene. As they suggest events, I will write each even on a piece of paper. When students have finished supplying events in the story, they will work together as a group to put the story in order on the wall. This allows students to get out of their seats and move, which will help them focus in the next section of the lesson. Once students have finished arranging the sheets, we will check their order using the book. We will leave this
action timeline on the wall throughout the lesson. Even though the action sequence is this story is simple, this activity allows students to see the relationships between scenes (p. 244) and prepares them for noticing this element in stories with a more challenging action sequence.

**Analysis** (Third Class)

In this section of the lesson, the classroom discussion moves from information and facts to interpretation. Especially in this section, the depth of discussion is directly related to the lesson goals, students’ English level, and age.

First, we will watch the 15 minute short film this author also made (See Vimeo link in reference section). The film was inspired by the story and also created by the author. There are no words in this film, so it will allow students to pay attention to the story and not solely focus on comprehending the language. Students will have paper and pencils at their desk to take notes about specific things they notice in this story and anything that is different from the book.

After finishing the film, we will spend a few minutes talking about the differences between the movie and the book. While the story concepts are the same, some things are different, such as Morris getting to the books’ “nest” by climbing over the fence. We will then spend the remainder of our class time talking about the theme of the book. While Gajdusek (1988) lists several things to talk about in this section, because of time and students’ ability, I am focusing on theme (p. 245). I believe the plot and climax will come out in our discussion. We will discuss theme, starting with the question from the book report about why the author wrote the book and addressing what he wanted people to feel about books and about reading. We will look at the timeline on the wall to see if the scenes in the book tell us about the theme. We will also discuss how the author used color in his illustrations to show what he thought about books and stories.
Since discussions about style are also part of the analysis section (p. 248), we will briefly review the onomatopoeia students found in the story. I will write each suggested word on the board and we will discuss what the words on the list might mean and the words students disagree on. While some onomatopoeia are distinct others may be up to personal opinion and may be influenced by their L1. Because we are dealing more with onomatopoeia in the poetry unit, I will not dwell on this part of the lesson.

**Book Type** (Third Lesson)

As the class wraps up, I will reference the story type charts on our wall. We will then discuss what type of story the students think that *The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore* is and why. They should have already thought through this when completing the book report.

**Extending Activities**

Extending activities make interaction go beyond just the text and are meant to be fun and elicit creative responses from students (p. 251). These activities should succeed if students understand the main content of the book (p. 252).

**Journaling Activity**

In the first extending activity, students will write a one page story in their journal about if they were the little girl who came after Mr. Morris Lessmore left. In their story, they should think about how they got to the books’ “nest,” what they did there, or what students found in Mr. Lessmore’s book. This journal activity is meant to spark students’ imagination and see if they can extend the author’s story, rather than have them write about what the author already showed (p. 252). This journal will be turned in at the next class period and will receive a grade of one through three. A story receiving a three includes complete sentences and cohesive paragraphs, is
at least one page, and logically extends the story with new ideas. A story receiving a two
includes some complete sentences and cohesive paragraphs, is about one page, and extends the
story with some new ideas. A story receiving a one includes few complete sentences and logical
paragraphs, is less than a page, and extends the story with ideas from the book.

**Video Book Reviews**

The second extending activity covers the entire story unit. We will watch a few clips of
book reviews from the Reading Rainbow TV series, such as the YouTube link in the reference
section. We will look at how each review includes some of the same information on our book
report form. Students will pick one book from our classroom library to read, write a book report
on using the form, and then present it to the class on video. I will put each review together to
make one video that we can watch as a class. Each student’s video review will be worth 25
points (Appendix D). Fifteen points are awarded for comprehension and analysis of the book,
five points are awarded for the written book report, and the final five points are awarded to the
oral presentation.

**Module Conclusion**

*The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore* is a fun book to start our focus on
story types. Literature used in the classroom should be appealing to and appropriate for students.
One of the goals for using this book is to help students develop a joy of reading, specifically in
English.

Students learning will be assessed in a variety of ways. The class discussion will be an
informal assessment of students’ ability to comprehend and discuss their reading. The book
report and journal assignment are both graded extra-class assignments. The book report is worth
5 points and the journal assignment is worth 3. The video book review will assess the entire
focus on story and see if students can comprehend and analyze a book of their own choosing without class or teacher input. It will also be a unique way to evaluate students since the assignment will not feel like an assessment to students. The concepts, vocabulary, and comprehension of the book will be included on the story types test at the end of the focus.
References


http://www.breitlinks.com/my_libmedia/children's_genres.htm


http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHAb6TYNX4w


http://www.wordcentral.com/
Appendix A – Text of *The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore* by William Joyce

Morris Lessmore loved words. He loved stories. He loved books.

His life was a book of his own writing, one orderly page after another. He would open it every morning and write of his joys and sorrows, of all that he knew and everything he hoped for.

But every story has its upsets. One day the sky darkened. The winds blew…

…till everything Morris knew was scattered – even the pages of his book.

He didn’t know what to do or which way to go. So he began to wander. And wander.

Then a happy bit of happenstance came his way. Rather than looking down as had become his habit, Morris Lessmore looked up. Drifting through the sky above him, Morris saw a lovely lady. She was being pulled along by a festive squadron of flying books.

Morris wondered if his book could fly. But it couldn’t. It would only fall to the ground with a depressing thud.

The flying lady knew that Morris simply needed a good story, so she sent him her favorite. The book was an amiable fellow, and urged Morris to follow him.

The book led him to an extraordinary building where many books were apparently “nested.”

Morris slowly walked inside and discovered the most mysterious and inviting room he had ever seen. It was filled with the fluttering of countless pages, and Morris could hear the faint chatter of a thousand different stories, as if each book was whispering of an invitation to adventure.

Then his new friend flew up to him and landed on his arm. It held itself open, as if hoping to be read. The room rustled to life.
And so Morris’ life among the books began.

Morris tried to keep the books in some sort of order, but they always mixed themselves up. The tragedies needed cheering up and would visit with the comedies. The encyclopedias, weary of facts, would relax with the comic books and fictions. All in all it was an agreeable jumble.

Morris found great satisfaction in caring for the books, gently fixing those with fragile bindings and unfolding the dog-eared pages of others.

Sometimes Morris would become lost in a book and scarcely emerge for days.

Morris liked to share the books with others. Sometimes it was a favorite that everyone loved, and other times he found a lonely little volume whose tale was seldom told.

“Everyone’s story matters,” said Morris. And all the books agreed.

At night, after all the stories that needed telling had been told and everyone had settled down to their proper places on the shelves, the great big dictionary would get in the last word.

Zzzzzz…

It was then that Morris Lessmore would once again write in his own book. He wrote of his joys and sorrows of all he knew and everything he hoped for.

The days passed. So did the months. And then years. And years…

…and Morris Lessmore became stooped and crinkly.

But the books never changed. Their stories stayed the same. Now his old friends took care of him the way he had once cared for them, and they read themselves to him each night.

Then one day he filled the last page of his book. He looked up and said with a bittersweet sigh, “I guess it’s time for me to move on.”
The books were sorry, but they understood. Morris put on his hat and took his cane. As he went to the door, he turned and smiled, “I’ll carry you all in here,” he said, and pointed to his heart.

The books waved their pages, and Morris Lessmore flew away. And as he flew, he changed back to the way he’d been that long ago day when they’d all first met.

The books were quiet for a while. Then they noticed that Morris Lessmore had left something behind. “It’s a book!” said his oldest friend. Inside was Morris’s story. All of his joys and sorrows, all that he knew and everything he hoped for.

Then the books heard a small, expectant sound. There in the doorway was a little girl. She looked around with wonder. Then something fantastic happened. Morris Lessmore’s book flew up to her and opened its pages. The little girl began to read. And so our story ends as it began…

…with the opening of a book.
**Appendix B – Vocabulary Worksheet**

Fill in the blank with the correct vocabulary word. Words may be used more than once.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extraordinary</th>
<th>Habit</th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
<th>Scatter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>Settle</td>
<td>Sorrow</td>
<td>Wander</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. We had an _____________ time at the museum.
2. The refugees will _____________ along the border.
3. It is good to have a _____________ of brushing your teeth.
4. The paper was written to my _____________.
5. I _____________ eat a hamburger.
6. The Chiang Mai Flower Festival was _____________.
7. Meena felt _____________ when her grandmother died.
8. Eating junk food is a bad _____________.
9. My brother will _____________ his toys all around the house.
10. Students are not allowed to _____________ in the hallway before school.
11. I _____________ see my friends in the United States.
12. We get _____________ from serving others.
13. You and Sing need to _____________ your argument.
14. The wind will _____________ all my papers.
15. Will you _____________ around town with me?
16. His life was full of joy and _____________.

Appendix C – Book Report Template

Name: ____________________________

Book Title: ____________________________________________________________

Author: ______________________________________________________________

Type of Book:       Modern Fiction    Historical Fiction    Fantasy
                   Non-fiction              Biography              Poetry

Who are the main characters?

1. ________________________________________________________________

2. ________________________________________________________________

3. ________________________________________________________________

4. ________________________________________________________________

What is the story about?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

What happens in the story?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

My Opinion:

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
## Appendix C – Book Review Video Grading Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Story Comprehension</strong></td>
<td>____/15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correct book type</td>
<td>____/1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies main characters and their roles</td>
<td>____/3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies main scenes and action points</td>
<td>____/4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concise and accurate summary</td>
<td>____/4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal evaluation relates to book</td>
<td>____/3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Written Report:</strong></td>
<td>____/5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete sentences where appropriate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Oral Presentation:</strong></td>
<td>____/5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete sentences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation order is logical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contains all parts of the review</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td>____/25</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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