

**INCORPORATING MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCE INTO FOLLOW-UP
ACTIVITIES IN TEACHING AMERICAN LITERATURE TO THE 4TH
YEAR STUDENTS AT FOE, HNUE**

Do Thi Phuong Mai, M.A.

ABCC Division

1. Introduction

American Literature course was designed for the fourth-year students in their 7th semester in the eight-semester course. It was a fifteen-week length course which provided students with an overall view of American literature in such issues as some basic knowledge on different stages of its development, factors that affect this development, some major literal trends, and some prominent American writers representing different stages and trends in literature.

Apart from aiming to increase the English-major students' proficiency in English and to encourage their reading habit, the syllabus developers also hoped that the selected texts would contribute to personal development and encourage appreciation of creative language use. The fulfilment of these goals ideally points towards an integration of the cultural, language and personal growth models of teaching literature (Carter, R & Long, M. 1991) and would not only improve language proficiency but enable students to make a connection between the texts and their personal lives. Literature is, therefore, viewed as a source of facts or information and the literary text as a product. (Sidhu, 2003). However, there aroused a problem that was the emphasis of the examination was placed on language learning. Additionally, English language teachers are sometimes hesitant about allowing students to interact and respond to the texts because of the students' different levels of language proficiency and their subject aptitudes in the same group. This sometimes causes difficulty in establishing a common ground, therefore, reinforcement and follow-up activities need to be done.

2. Content

2.1. The sample

***“The story of an hour”* by Kate Chopin**

The story is about an hour in the life of the main character, Mrs. Millard. She is afflicted with a heart problem. Bad news has come about that her husband has died in a train accident. Her sister Josephine and Richard who is her husband's friend has to break the horrifying news to her as gently as possible. They both were concerned that the news might somehow put her in great danger with her health. Ironically, Mrs. Millard reacts to the news with excitement. Even though the news is heartbreaking she is finally free from the depressing life she was living. She keeps whispering "Free! Body and soul free!". She now is happy because she doesn't have to live for anyone but herself now. At the end of the story, Mr. Millard opens the door and is surprised by Josephine's cry. Mr. Millard didn't have a faintest idea about the accident. With a quick motion, Richard tried to block Mr. Millard's view of his wife but it was too late. The doctors said she died of a heart disease. The story ends with a short phrase "of joy that kills".

Introducing the story

When I first introduced the story to my students, it was met with a very enthusiastic response from students of all English language proficiency levels due to the appealing theme and its appropriate length. Thus, despite the fairly wide language proficiency gap between different students, the warming up activities, which included brainstorming for possible meanings and interpretation of the terms and phrases, managed to elicit a wide range of spontaneous responses from students even though they were partly delivered in their mother tongue. The warming up and subsequent sessions facilitated students' general comprehension and familiarising with difficult words and also gave them several insights into the possibilities of the story. The questions and comments they made reflected their keen interest. As their language teacher, I needed to make these students believe that they could actually 'possess' this story and make it their own at some level. In order to allow every student an opportunity to interact with the poem in a way that was most meaningful to them, I drew upon the concept of multiple intelligences

(Howard Gardner, 1983) which proposes that students will benefit more from a more diverse vision of education and by using different methodologies, exercises and activities as a loose framework for the post-reading activities.

Follow-up activities

As a follow up activity to the story, students were given the assignment of interpreting the story in any way they wanted, either in groups or as an individual activity. Some suggestions were made to help students have some ideas about what to do. They were given one week to prepare their presentations.

2.2. Results and discussion

Visual representation (Cf. appendix)

Two groups of students, four members each, visualized the story in the way they think it should happen. These students may be limited in verbal linguistic skills and as their teachers, I realized that they were generally slow learners. Even if they found it difficult to express themselves verbally they could still understand what was happening in the story and relate to it. Perhaps the visual representation was over-simplistic yet it meant something important to the artist. In this case, their visual intelligence is outstanding from in other types of intelligences.

The journals

About one fourth of the students chose to make journal entry responses to the story. Most of them had a higher level of English language proficiency compared to the others and even occasionally wrote their thoughts and reflections in their own diaries too.

The following are extracts from two journals.

Extract 1

This is a great story. First I feel sad because the woman has just lost her husband. But then I feel excited and happy when she starts to say "Free!" thinking of all the things she is going to do now that she does not have a husband that prevents her from doing things. And finally when she gets out of the room to express her happiness, her husband is at the door and alive and she dies. I

wouldn't want that to happen to me. It's like I just won the lottery prize and after I scream and jump of excitement I really I didn't win and just die in the moment.

Extract 2

Reading the story, I have a feeling that Mrs. Mallard is like a person who was “dead” long before her physical death. Her physical death was described as “the joy that kills.” When hearing that her husband was dead, she celebrated her new life. The scene in which she was living prior to learning about her husband’s “death”, could not have been thought of as really living. If her sole desire was to be free of her marriage, which is supposedly lifelong, then what type of life was she truly living?

The journals reflected intrapersonal intelligence, which involves introspective and self-reflective capacities. Multiple Intelligences theory categorizes people with intrapersonal intelligence as intuitive and typically introverted and skilful at deciphering their own feelings and motivations. Although the students who had chosen to do the journal entries were not typically introverted, they were the ones in the class who usually wrote essays that reflected a deeper understanding of the self and their own emotional reactions.

Found poem

One group of five students summarizes the story and then they choose a prose passage and underline words or phrases that strike their interest or that relate to the theme of the passage. After that, with the help of teacher, they take these images and "find" a poem. They are freely to add new words or change words if they seem cumbersome, but the base of the poem is still the actual words and phrases from the original text. The poem highly reflected students’ verbal/ linguistic intelligence and their interest in Literature as well.

And here is the poem.

<i>Brently</i>	<i>Mallard's</i>	<i>name</i>	<i>There was a dull stare in her eyes</i>
<i>Leading the list of killed</i>			<i>And an intelligent thought</i>

<i>In a railroad disaster</i>	<i>What was it?</i>
<i>Hearing the news</i>	<i>“Free, free, free”</i>
<i>She wept at once</i>	<i>Absolutely</i>
<i>Went to her room alone</i>	<i>Free! Body and soul</i>
<i>Facing the open window, a roomy armchair</i>	<i>A long procession of years to come</i>
<i>She sank,</i>	<i>Would belong to herself</i>
<i>Then sat motionless</i>	<i>And she carried herself</i>
	<i>Like a goddess of Victory</i>

Drama

One group chose to do a small drama based on the story. It was a seven minute play with the main character is Ms. Mallard since she heard the news of her husband’s death. This form of genre adaptation involved Gardner’s Interpersonal-linguistic intelligence, which has to do with interaction with others. The drama added another dimension to the story and the creation of characters, script and setting seemed to bring it to life in the language classroom. The students seemed to be great actors and actresses!

Mind-mapping and Timeline

One group of students drew a timeline of the story; all the main events in the story are given in a logical and easy-to-understand way. This group of students seemed to be logical in their thinking and illustrated their ideas very clearly.

Setting	
Time and place: At Mallard’s house	Characters: Mrs. Louise Mallard Mr. Brently Mallard Josephine – Louise’s sister Richard – Mr. Mallard’s friend
Chain of events	
The beginning events that initiate the actions	Mrs. Mallard has a bad heart, but she still survives when hearing the news of her husband's death.

Internal response and goal/ problem	She cries a lot and wants to be by herself in a locked room.
Attempts and outcome	While alone, she does some thinking and she knows that she's happy when her husband died, because she's so scared and excited about getting to be an independent individual again.
Climax	As soon as she's come to terms with this new feeling of freedom, she leaves the room, then she saw her husband and she was too shock
Resolution	Mrs. Mallard dies.

3. Conclusion

The idea to incorporate multiple intelligences into follow-up activities in the EFL literature classroom resulted in many interesting results. First, despite the fact that there was a lot of overlapping among the different ‘intelligences’, students generally chose to interpret the story in the way they felt most comfortable with and best at. Each of them had a personal entry point into the story and for many this proved to be a first-time experience of interacting with a literary text on their own terms. This also gave them a sense of empowerment and helped to build confidence and an enthusiasm towards exploring the other texts. It provided even students with very limited language proficiency with an avenue to enjoy and appreciate literary texts that might previously have seemed unattainable . As the language teacher, it was also a lesson to me that with students if they were unable to express themselves eloquently through words alone, they are quite confident in exploiting the text in many other ways.

References

- [1]]Beach, Richard. (1993) *A Teacher's Introduction to Reader Response Theories* -. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English
- [2] Carter, R & Long, M. (1991). *Teaching Literature*, Longman

- [3] Gardner, Howard. (1999) *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century*. New York: Basic Books
- [4] Glasgow.(1997)*Utilizing our Multiple Intelligences Reader Response Activities*.
- [5] Holland, N (1968) *Dynamics of Literary Response* Oxford University Press, 1968.
- [6] Rosenblatt, L. M. (1938, 1978). *Literature as exploration*. New York: Appleton Century
- [7] Rosenblatt, L. M. (1938, 1978). *The reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of the literary work*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.
- [8] Sidhu,G.K.(2003) *Literature in the Language Classroom: Seeing through the eyes of learners*.