

Why and how to use short fiction in the ESL classroom.

By Amanda McGeer

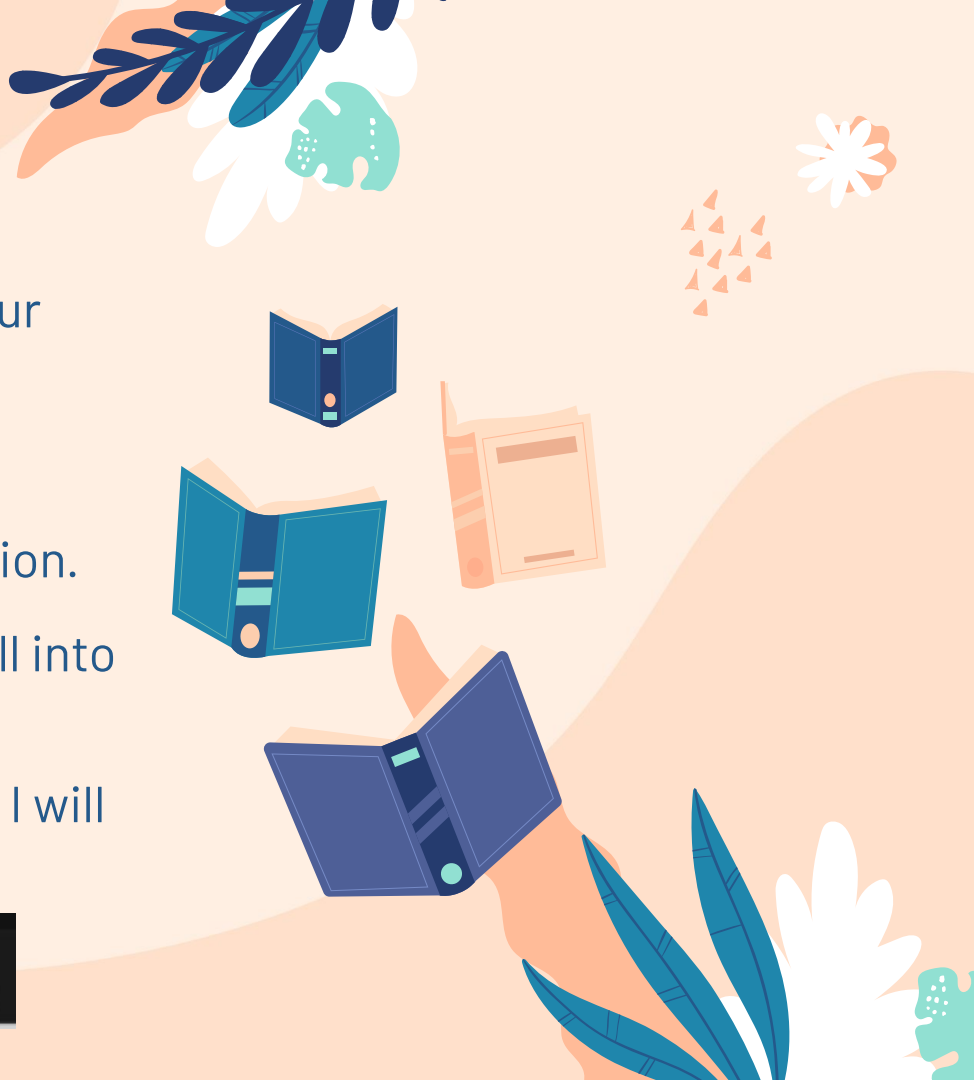
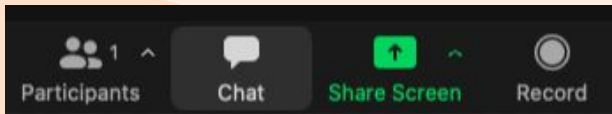
Sunday February 21st 2021

ELT Ireland 7th Annual Conference

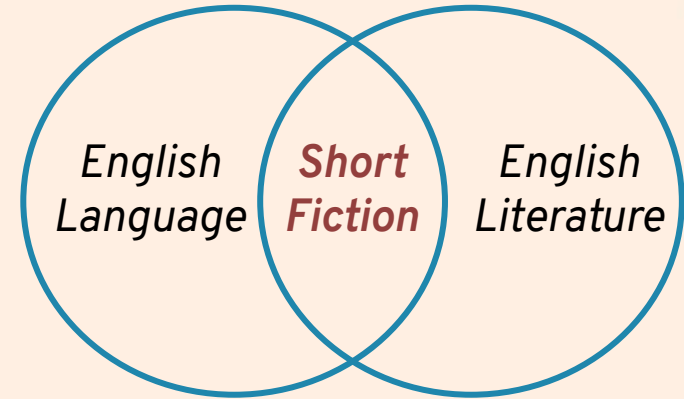


Welcome and thank you for joining me!

- Why we should use short fiction in our classrooms.
- How to choose a short story.
- How to plan a lesson using short fiction.
- A breakout room activity putting it all into practice.
- **Questions?** Put them in the chat and I will answer them at the end.



“Teacher, how can I improve my reading?”



“The short story is a love affair, a novel is a marriage. A short story is a photograph, a novel is a movie.” – Lorrie Moore

**The main aim =
satisfaction.**

How do I choose a short story?

Context

Length
(Max. 10 pages)

Student

Story

**Language
Level**

Age

Country

Location

Author

Time

Of origin

Of study

How do I adapt the story?

Don't.

- Changing and adapting the story for the level disrupts the main aim of **satisfaction**.
- Footnote difficult vocabulary to maintain comprehension.

“The Demon Lover”

By Elizabeth Bowen

Published in 1945

Toward the end of her day in London Mrs. Drover went round to her shut-up¹ house to look for several things she wanted to take away. Some belonged to herself, some to her family, who were by now used to their country life. It was late August; it had been a steamy, showery day: At the moment the trees down the pavement glittered² in an escape of humid yellow afternoon sun. Against the next batch of clouds, already piling up ink-dark, broken chimneys and parapets³ stood out. In her once familiar street, as in any unused channel, an unfamiliar queerness⁴ had silted up; a cat wove itself in and out of railings, but no human eye watched Mrs. Dover's return. Shifting some parcels under her arm, she slowly forced round her latchkey⁵ in an unwilling lock⁶, then gave the door, which had warped, a push with her knee. Dead air came out to meet her as she went in.

¹ “shut up” - closed, nobody is living there.

² “glittered” (adj) - to shine/glow because of the sun.

³ “parapets” (n) - a low wall along the edge of a roof/bridge.

⁴ “queerness” - strange/unusual.

⁵ “latchkey” (n) - a key.

How do I make a lesson?

Reading Stage 1 - Before:

- Generate predictions about the **title**.
- Information about the **author**.
 - Personal context & connection to the story
- **Literary theory:**
 - Ernest Hemingway's "Iceberg Theory" or "Theory of Omission".

"If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about **he may omit things that he knows and the reader**, if the writer is writing truly enough, **will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them**. The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water."

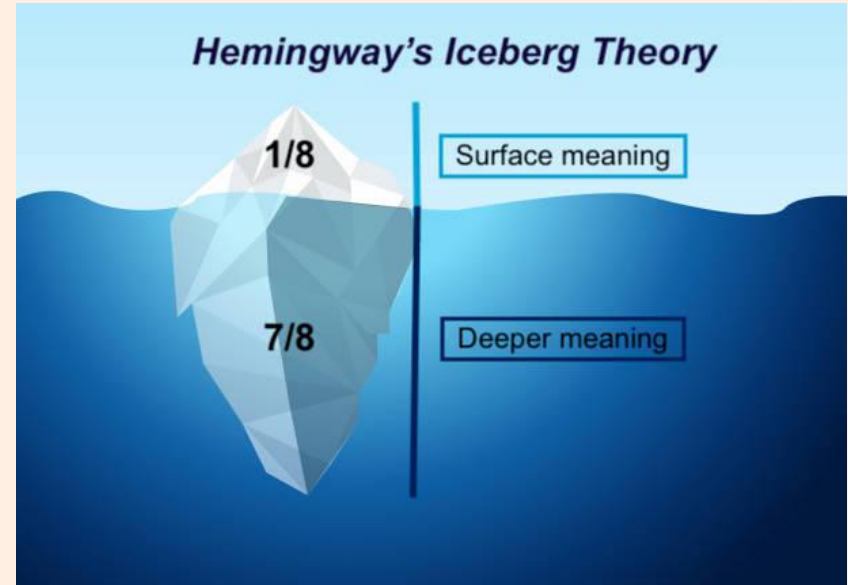
- Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon* (1932)

Three stages:

Before, during & after reading.

"The Demon Lover"

By Elizabeth Bowen



How do I make a lesson?

Reading Stage 2: During

- Use **comprehension questions** to navigate the focus of your lesson.

Language analysis: Linguistic & Literary.

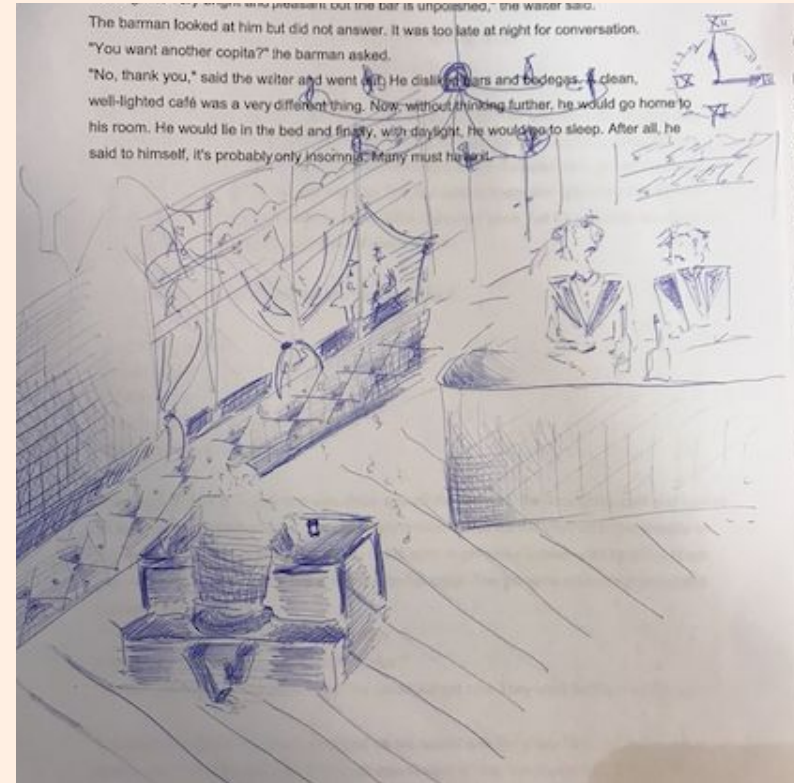
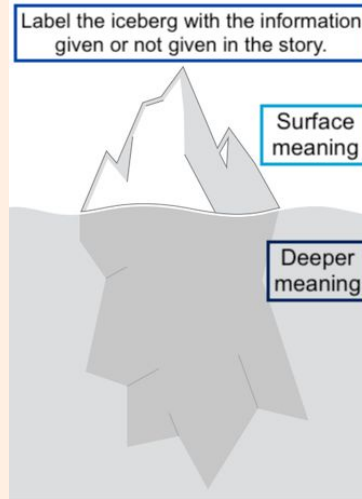
- Linguistic: Questions that focus on -
 - Confirming understanding
 - Highlighting grammar structures
 - Developing vocabulary
- Literary: Questions that focus on -
 - Imagery
 - Emotions
 - Characters

1. What are the strongest or most detailed **images** for you? What language creates these images?
2. What **mood or atmosphere** do the first two paragraphs of the story create? What words or phrases create this mood?
3. What is [character's] **personality** like?

How do I make a lesson?

Reading Stage 3: After

- Return to the **title** - how accurate were the predictions? What moments or characteristics connect to the title?
- Return to the **Iceberg Theory**.
- Remember the priority - to achieve **satisfaction**.
 - Focus on the student's engagement with imagery, emotions and characters.
- A time for student and teacher satisfaction.



Breakout Rooms Activity:

In your Breakout Room, discuss the following questions:

1. How have you used literature in your lessons?
2. Take one minute to read the first paragraph of “*A Clean, Well-Lighted Place*” (1933) by Ernest Hemingway.
What is the **first thing** you would examine in a lesson about this story?
3. For this story, what kind of questions would you ask to generate ideas about **imagery, emotion and character**?

Return to this main link in **15 minutes**.

Link to the document is in the chat!



Thank you!

If you would like to read more, I have an article in the *Yearly Bulletin* on the same topic.

Please let me know how your journey with short fiction evolves!



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