

Encouraging Creativity: Reading and Writing Short Stories

(Case Study at Al Fath School Indonesia, Cirendeu, South Jakarta)

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the use of short stories in the process of learning English for grade 6 students at Al Fath School Indonesia, especially in improving reading and writing skill. Every year, Al Fath students take special training in writing short stories. They study plot structure diagrams and compare them with the short stories they read, then they write their own short stories. The results of the short stories that the children wrote were then analyzed and collected into an anthology book with ISBN. This article is expected to provide an overview and example for schools to encourage students' creativity in reading and writing activities.

Keywords: Reading Skill, Short Story, Writing Skill.

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature that is used as a tool in teaching foreign languages and to improve students' language skills has been implemented in the last few decades. [1] The use of literature in foreign language curricula is strongly suggested by many studies. [2][3] One form of literature that is favored by readers because of its concise form is short story. Short stories usually only have one thousand to five thousand words, with a clear beginning, middle and ending, which can be finished to read quickly but are able to move the reader with its impression.

Reading and writing are the last two skills that students can improve after listening and speaking. Short story as a form of literature becomes an alternative media for students in learning many things related to attitudes and views of life. Reading literature makes students get a lot of depiction about the behavior and reactions of people in different situations and build meaning with things that are in harmony with the reader's own background knowledge. Short story is a media that has unique characteristics that are very suitable to use in reading practice. [4] Developing reading skill by using short stories can be both fun and educational at the same time. [5] Various strategies can be implemented to make teaching short stories enjoyable and offer a rich experience in helping reading comprehension.[4] Thus, comprehending the content of a short story can improve students' reading skill. [6]

Reading as a receptive skill has a role in encouraging students' creativity to write. The short stories they read will later inspire them to write their own works. If they read the short story seriously, they learn the various elements in the story indirectly. Studying short stories also give them experience of understanding figurative meanings, symbolism, themes, plots and characters. [7] In addition, in order to make reading activities easier, short story also has other advantages, including helping students to be more creative, improving their critical thinking skills, buiding cultural awareness, reducing students' anxiety and helping them feel more relaxed, as well as providing an understanding of other cultures because of its universality. [8]

The most difficult step when writing a short story is to outline a topic that is divided into short story elements. [9] Reading existing short stories and studying the elements in them allows students to minimize their difficulties. This shows that reading and writing are receptive-active skills that cannot be separated. Writing activities are the core of a series of experiences, both from reading and interacting with the environment. [10] Writing becomes a process to express the writer's ideas, feelings, imagination, therefore it can be assumed that writing skill is a communication activity. [11]

Writing is a complex and cognitively demanding activity that is acquired since elementary education and continues to be developed throughout life. The complexity relates to imagination and experience to cultivate intrinsic and extrinsic elements. Therefore, the use of words, diction and sentence structure must be able to convey the intent and message to the reader, which is a difficulty faced by students in the process of making short stories. [12] Writing short stories is an effort to convey knowledge from the author's point of view, where each writer can convey ideas that are in line with their thoughts and cultural background. [13] Confidence in writing skills also motivates students to be creative, supported by feedback that can have an impact on the development of intrinsic motivation and encourage their desire to find better solutions and strategies. [14]

Grade 6 teachers at Al Fath School Indonesia have an interesting strategy in encouraging students to be creative in writing short stories. Every year, they provide special training for its students, especially those in grade 6. The training is guided by professional writers and people who have roles in the world of book publishing. After the training, the children are required to write their own short stories in English. Their works are then reviewed by an editor for publication in an anthology with ISBN. This strategy is able to provide motivation and encouragement for students in expressing their stories and imagination.

2. METHODOLOGY

This article is a case study that implements qualitative research through narrative data obtained from participants. The sources of research data include: (a) 118 6th grade students of Al Fath School Indonesia, (b) teachers who teach English, (c) tutors who provide special training for students, and (d) documents, such as short stories written by student and anthology books. The data was collected through observation, interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis. The data obtained are presented in the form of a narrative description to find out students' ability in writing short stories.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Short Story Writing Program at Al Fath School Indonesia

The short story writing program in English is a mandatory activity for 6th grade students required by the teachers of Al Fath School Indonesia, Cirende, South Jakarta which is held every year. This is intended to encourage students' creativity in addition to improve their English writing skill. In everyday life, students are also accustomed to speaking in English at school. Writing in English is certainly another challenge for them, considering it is the most difficult skill in language learning.

Al Fath School Indonesia students are given the freedom to write any story they want. They can write everyday stories about family and friends, interesting experiences, horror and mystery stories, even their imaginations about talking animals. They were so enthusiastic when they talked about the ideas they wanted to put into the classroom. In addition, Al Fath School Indonesia accommodates all stories written by students, without exception, to be published together in an anthology book that has ISBN and is released by a trusted publisher. This further increases their

motivation to write. Moreover, they can see their names together in the cover, thus, the anthology becomes their memory book after they graduate from the school.

3.2. Special Training for Short Story Writing

In a special training for short story writing for 118 6th graders, Al Fath School Indonesia collaborated with Yayasan Alo Edu Indonesia, an institution that focuses on education, social activities and book publishing. In the training held in December 2020, the students learned more about the elements that can build short stories, such as characterizations, setting, plot and conflict. The elements of the short story can be seen in the figure below:

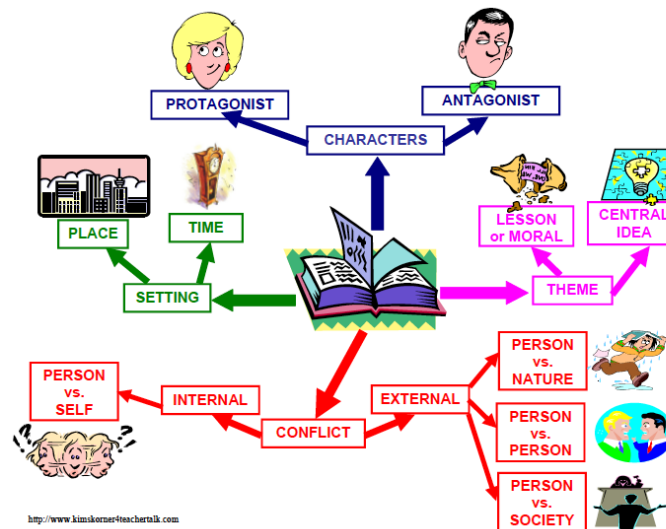


Figure 3.1. The Elements of a Short Story

The tutor associated these elements with stories that had been already familiar to Al Fath students, such as books, fairy tales, films, and even serials that they often watch to make them better understand the shape of these elements.



Figure 3.2. The Example of Short Story Elements

They also learned about the plot structure diagrams in a short story by going back to studying the stories they already know. The form of the diagram is as below:

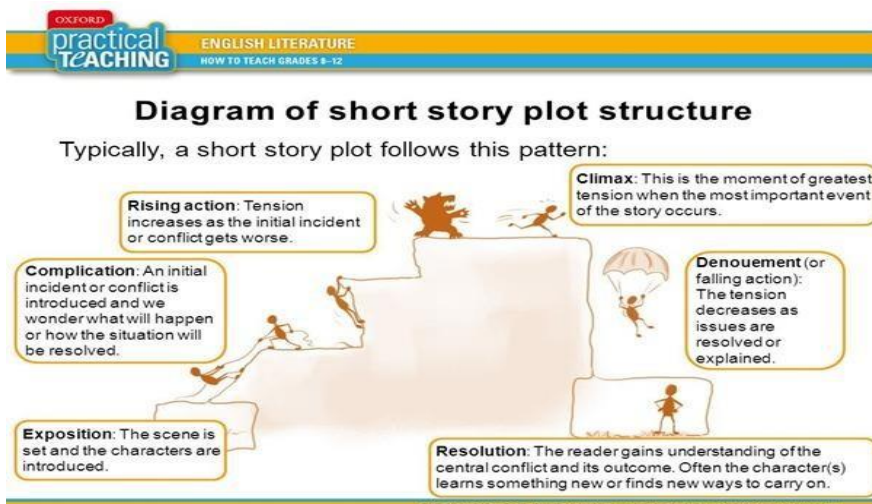


Figure 3.3. The Diagram of Plot Structure in a Short Story

The plot structure diagram was then implemented into the short stories they wrote. Of course, with the guidance of Al Fath School Indonesia's English teachers. They could also share stories and ideas with their classmates during the writing process. With 188 students of Al Fath School Indonesia active in writing, if they are consistent, according to the speaker, every year there will be a hundred and even more new writers and the future of literature in Indonesia is much more brighter.

3.3 The Anthology Book of Short Stories Written by Al Fath School Indonesia Students

The short stories written by the students were then submitted to the English teachers for review. After that, the teachers submitted the short stories to the editorial team of Yayasan Alo Edu Indonesia as the publisher. Thus, their writings were edited twice. While their short stories were being edited by a team of editors, cover designs and layouts were prepared. The title of the anthology book is "A Trip to Another World". This title was taken from one of the short stories written by one of the students and the title was mutually agreed by the publisher team and the teachers. This title also describes the students' journey into the world of their unlimited imagination and creativity.

The cover of this book shows a hot air balloon making the journey without hitting the walls and screens. The background color that depicts the sky and clouds in an abstract way also illustrates the ideas that are not stuck on the existing colors. This setting also illustrates that the creativity of students is also something that we should not standardize.

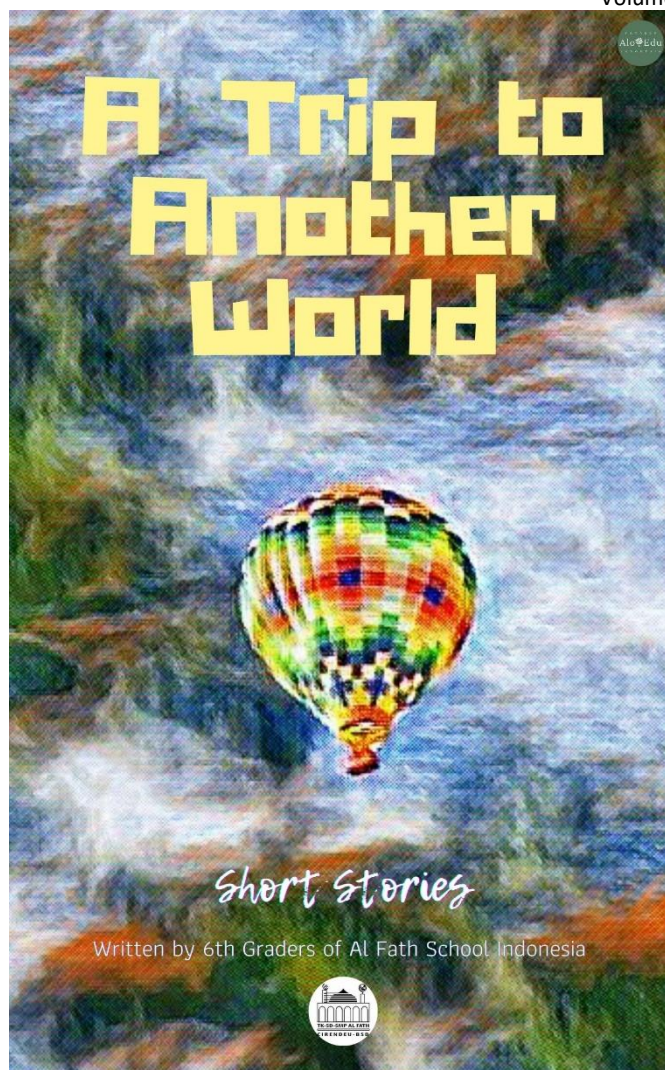


Figure 3.4 The Cover of the Short Story Anthology Written by Al Fath School Indonesia students

This short story anthology book was then submitted to the national library to obtain an ISBN (International Standard Book Number). The ISBN number for this book is 978-623-95973-1-3.

4. CONCLUSION

Reading and writing are two language skills that cannot be separated. This is what Al Fath School Indonesia does to encourage the creativity of their students in writing short stories. The special training held by the school, where students were given the opportunity to learn more about the elements of short stories and plot structure diagrams also made it easier for them to organize their ideas into a short story. Meanwhile, the program to publish a short stories anthology with ISBN encourages their motivation to be more creative. This book is not only a memory book for students, but also a concrete documentation of ongoing programs and can be an example for other institutions in encouraging the creativity of their students, especially in reading and writing.

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