

PiXL Spine – English Literature – Narratives and Narrators

Activity 1:

Read this article ***‘How Stories Are Told Around the World’*** by Amy Choi and answer the questions which follow it.

Storytelling has always been less about glitz or gadgetry and more about connection and communication. No matter the tech, humans have invariably figured out a compelling way to tell each other stories. That’s not to say we all tell stories the same way. Far from it. As Kay Turner, a folklorist who’s on the board of the New York Folklore Society, notes, “Even if a story is the same, each culture will tell it differently, because each one has its own genres and cultural rules.” That’s led to a host of different traditions and practices beloved around the world. Here are just some of them.

Hula

You might not know it while on an island vacation, but traditional hula dancers dance not to a beat, but to language, Hawaiian-language chants or songs. Without the words, the dance loses meaning as a story. Hula shares traditional stories as well as mythology and creation tales, including those of the gods and goddesses of the islands.

Chinese Shadow Puppetry

Traditional shadow puppetry tells folk stories, issues moral lessons, and projects specific local customs. Most often seen at celebrations such as weddings or religious festivals, the puppets are silhouettes shaped from leather or paper that are manipulated on long rods by storytellers. The puppeteers either sing, or are accompanied by singers and musicians. Though it originated in China during the Han dynasty, the tradition has spread to countries throughout Southeast Asia.

Zajal

The classical Arabic version of a poetry slam or rap battle, Zajal originated in Lebanon and is practised across the Middle East and the United Arab Emirates. Competitions pit one poet or spoken-word artist against another. One poet recites a stanza (often insulting the opponent), then the other responds with a stanza using the same metre and rhyme.

Rakugo

This Japanese tradition is performed in monologues by a single storyteller, called a *hanashika*. The storytellers are similar to comedians, and they tell tales of daily life and reinforce historical and moral lessons, though they generally avoid making direct reference to particular events or figures.

Griot

Griots, are the traditional keepers of a society’s history in West African cultures. Griot storytellers often play instruments such as the kora, similar to a lute, and preserve family and cultural histories. In some West African cultures, griots were at once singers of praise and messengers for nobility.

<https://ideas.ted.com/how-stories-are-told-around-the-world/>

Short answer tasks:

1. List four different types of stories that can be told by Hula dancers.

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2. Where might you be able to see Chinese shadow puppetry performed?

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3. Where did *Zajal* originate?

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4. In which storytelling tradition would you find a *hanashika*?

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5. In which culture would a storyteller be most likely to play a 'kora'?

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Longer answer tasks:

1. After reading the article, what do you understand about how important storytelling is in different cultures?

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2. What is your all-time favourite story and why is it important to you?

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Creative Task

How do you think we will continue to tell stories in the future? Imagine it is the year 2120. Write the opening of a short story showing a community sharing their stories.

You may like to watch this short TED talk to get you thinking:

https://www.ted.com/talks/joe_sabia_the_technology_of_storytelling

Activity 2:

Decide which of these novel openings are:

- first person narratives
- third person narratives

Extract A:

Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents, grumbled Jo, lying on the rug.

It's so dreadful to be poor! sighed Meg, looking down at her old dress.

I don't think it's fair for some girls to have plenty of pretty things, and other girls nothing at all, added little Amy, with an injured sniff.

We've got Father and Mother, and each other, said Beth contentedly from her corner.

The four young faces on which the firelight shone brightened at the cheerful words, but darkened again as Jo said sadly, We haven't got Father, and shall not have him for a long time. She didn't say perhaps never, but each silently added it, thinking of Father far away, where the fighting was.

Little Women: Louisa M. Alcott

Extract B:

3 May. Bistritz. Left Munich at 8:35 P.M, on 1st May, arriving at Vienna early next morning; should have arrived at 6:46, but train was an hour late. Buda-Pesth seems a wonderful place, from the glimpse which I got of it from the train and the little I could walk through the streets. I feared to go very far from the station, as we had arrived late and would start as near the correct time as possible.

The impression I had was that we were leaving the West and entering the East; the most western of splendid bridges over the Danube, which is here of noble width and depth, took us among the traditions of Turkish rule.

We left in pretty good time, and came after nightfall to Klausenburgh. Here I stopped for the night at the Hotel Royale. I had for dinner, or rather supper, a chicken done up some way with red pepper, which was very good but thirsty. (Mem. get recipe for Mina.) I asked the waiter, and he said it was called "paprika hendl," and that, as it was a national dish, I should be able to get it anywhere along the Carpathians.

I found my smattering of German very useful here, indeed, I don't know how I should be able to get on without it.

Dracula: Bram Stoker

Extract C:

I returned from the City about three o'clock on that May afternoon pretty well disgusted with life. I had been three months in the Old Country, and was fed up with it. If anyone had told me a year ago that I would have been feeling like that I should have laughed at him; but there was the fact. The weather made me liverish, the talk of the ordinary Englishman made me sick, I couldn't get enough exercise, and the amusements of London seemed as flat as soda-water that has been standing in the sun. 'Richard Hannay,' I kept telling myself, 'you have got into the wrong ditch, my friend, and you had better climb out.'

The 39 Steps: John Buchan

Extract D:

Dorothy lived in the midst of the great Kansas prairies, with Uncle Henry, who was a farmer, and Aunt Em, who was the farmer's wife. Their house was small, for the lumber to build it had to be carried by wagon many miles. There were four walls, a floor and a roof, which made one room; and this room contained a rusty looking cookstove, a cupboard for the dishes, a table, three or four chairs, and the beds. Uncle Henry and Aunt Em had a big bed in one corner, and Dorothy a little bed in another corner. There was no garret at all, and no cellar—except a small hole dug in the ground, called a cyclone cellar, where the family could go in case one of those great whirlwinds arose, mighty enough to crush any building in its path. It was reached by a trap door in the middle of the floor, from which a ladder led down into the small, dark hole.

The Wizard of Oz: L. Frank Baum

Extract E:

It was the last day of July. The long hot summer was drawing to a close; and we, the weary pilgrims of the London pavement, were beginning to think of the cloud-shadows on the corn-fields, and the autumn breezes on the sea-shore.

For my own poor part, the fading summer left me out of health, out of spirits, and, if the truth must be told, out of money as well. During the past year I had not managed my professional resources as carefully as usual; and my extravagance now limited me to the prospect of spending the autumn economically between my mother's cottage at Hampstead and my own chambers in town.

The evening, I remember, was still and cloudy; the London air was at its heaviest; the distant hum of the street-traffic was at its faintest; the small pulse of the life within me, and the great heart of the city around me, seemed to be sinking in unison, languidly and more languidly, with the sinking sun. I roused myself from the book which I was dreaming over rather than reading, and left my chambers to meet the cool night air in the suburbs. It was one of the two evenings in every week which I was accustomed to spend with my mother and my sister. So I turned my steps northward in the direction of Hampstead.

The Woman in White: Wilkie Collins

Choose the story opening that you find most interesting here and aim to write the next 250 words, keeping to the same narrative point of view.

Experimenting with narrative voices.

Try these creative writing exercises for yourself:

1. Write your own 'stream of consciousness' without stopping at all for three minutes. You could take your inspiration by looking around your classroom or out of the window. On your marks, get set, go ... At the end of three minutes look back at what you have written. Could this be reworked into a short story?
2. Write the opening to a short story using first person narrative, using the point of view of someone who has woken up in a place they do not recognise.
3. Write down the title of your favourite song. Write a short story in third person narrative perspective based on the title of the song.
4. Decide on two people who may be connected with a single event. For example: a waiter in a restaurant and a customer; a burglar and the owner of the house they burgled; a teacher and a student. Write up the story of the single event they have in common from the different perspectives of each of the two characters.
5. Create a story that consists entirely of emails sent between two characters.



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