

# Storytelling for Enriching EFL H.S. Classes

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## Teaching Mottoes:

**The teacher must interest herself so that she can interest her students.**

**The teacher doesn't have to be perfect in trying a new method to teach.**

*Students' interest and participation are considered to be the key to successful teaching. As an English teacher for 20 years, I often find it hard to motivate my students or keep my students interested in class, for the class size is big, the textbook is confined to the design of curriculum, and the limited time each lesson shares. The teacher can either make the routine lessons into multi-facet teaching or to leave the class bored. Under such circumstances, I have made it rule to find at least one "fun point" for each lesson and start teaching with the "fun point," and storytelling is one of them. I was first introduced to this method in 2004, when I joined in an enriched course in the University of Oregon with the other 19 high school teachers. On the visit to a high school, I observed how functional storytelling could be in teaching a class and came up with the idea that storytelling might be applied in my own class with some alteration. Ever since, I have tried more or less the technique in some of my teaching materials. But it is not until this contribution that I start to do research on its theory, re-organize its teaching procedures and make a complete record of my Storytelling Lesson.*

## Introduction

This report proposes storytelling as an effective method of enriching EFL teaching in senior high schools in Taiwan. Different from its theoretical design, the storytelling approach is incorporated into school textbooks, carried out before the

reading by the teacher or after the lesson by the students, depending on the genre of the materials and the teacher's application. Storytelling is defined in this report as the process whereby teachers present texts in the form of telling stories to facilitate comprehension or students retell texts in a new construction to develop integrative skills. Storytelling emphasizes a positive, collaborative, and supportive classroom climate in which students could develop skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Storytelling as text presentation can turn the often dreary text lecturing into exciting and fruitful experiences in learning. Storytelling as a post-text activity is an example of learner-centered process that guides students to apply information and convey messages to others. Teaching by storytelling, teachers' teaching brilliance is displayed to the fullest, because a storyteller plays the multi-role of a teacher, an artist and an actor. Storytelling as a pedagogical technique, whether applied alone or with other techniques, has been used by many teachers in the world. Modern teachers who employ this technique as a teaching tool are using a technique that has stood the test of time.

Storytelling as a teaching method has been extensively used in preschool and elementary school language teaching. Most children learn their first words and language patterns through listening to the stories told by their parents with picture books. Few people consider storytelling, though, a practical method as the children grow into their teens. Teaching with stories is a seemingly impractical approach to teachers in Taiwan, where teachers teach by textbook, materials commonly presented through reading or listening, grammar concepts often explained before students have enough input. However, through some variation, certain teaching materials can be

re-made into intriguing stories, grammatical structures deliberately demonstrated within the context of a narrative and then taught after they are comfortably received. As the teacher directs the story, the students listen and respond to the teacher's guiding questions. Both parts work collaboratively to complete the task. Afterwards, some follow-up activities are designed to increase the students' writing and speaking abilities. In the sense, storytelling not only develops the students' listening comprehension skill but also improves their expressive language ability.

### **Theoretical Models**

A critical concept for second-language development for students is comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985). Comprehensible input means that students should be able to understand what is being said or presented to them. Students learn new language elements best when they receive input that is just a bit more difficult than they can easily understand. If there is "comprehensible input," the learner has a low "affective filter" (Krashen, 1985) and the language is used and repeated in interesting ways such as telling stories, then the learner will acquire the language.

#### **Comprehensible Input**

The majority of language is acquired through comprehensible input. New items are introduced within the framework of the learners' pre-existing knowledge and are one step beyond the learner's current state of linguistic competence. For example, if a learner is at a stage "i", then learning takes place when he is exposed to "input" that belongs to "i+1". Target words and structures are heard as many times as possible so that they can be internalized by the learner. The point is not to get the student to repeat the new vocabulary, but to hear it many times first.

Repetition is a crucial element in the process of input. The students must hear the target words and structures in the language as many times as possible so that the language starts to become internalized.

### **Affective Filter**

The "affective filter" develops from a fears on the part of the students – fear of failure, fear of peers, and fear of appearing stupid. A number of variables affective second language acquisitions, including motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. Learners learn better when they have high motivation, self-confidence and a low level of anxiety. In storytelling, the students' affective filter is kept at a low level by a relaxed classroom atmosphere, where the stress of response and being scored is kept to a minimum. To lower the "affective filter," the classroom must be an environment in which the students feels safe to learn, and does not fear using the language.

## **Strategies**

### **Storytelling Strategy**

Storytelling strategy utilizes the vocabulary and structure taught in the earlier stage by incorporating them into stories that the students listen, watch, retell, read, and write. Subsequent stories introduce additional vocabulary and structures in meaningful contexts. The students are already familiar with stories from life experiences, and now they are exposed to this familiar genre as the teacher presents it in a new language with an abundance of gestures, pictures, and other props to facilitate comprehension. After hearing a story, various students act it out together or assume different roles while their peers watch. Students are not required to memorize the stories; on the contrary, they are encouraged to construct their own variations as they retell, using props such as illustrations, toys, and labels. The

ultimate goal is to have students develop original stories and share them with others.

### **Drama Strategy**

Drama strategy is the process of story building and storytelling. This process encourages students to create their own story by reading, analyzing and reconstructing the text content. The advantage of the process is that it gives students a chance to fully examine the content while challenging them to extend their communication skills both vocally and physically. Through a series of enjoyable drama activities, students can work together to informally dramatize a learning material, presenting the story with their own words and actions. The objectives of the drama strategy are to inspire students to imagine and develop detailed stories and to make them feel comfortable when creating and sharing presentations. Storytelling through drama provides EFL students with engaging opportunities to develop both basic language skills and higher level thinking skills.

## **Steps of Storytelling**

### **Find the Story**

The teacher first selects lessons with storylines from the textbook and adapts them into versions that suit the students.

### **Learn the Story**

The teacher reads and re-reads the text to map the plot, analyzes the text, and outlines the major sequences of the plot. The plot should be thought of as a series of successive scenes, and a skeleton is suggested for a reminder of the key points. And it is necessary to cut subplots from the sequence since subplots may make the story difficult to follow

## **Prepare the Story**

After learning the story, the teacher visualizes the succession scenes with skeleton outlines. Then some cue cards can be prepared to remind the interactive questions in class. The teacher must control the story's vocabulary and patterns within the students' comprehensible input. New vocabulary is introduced with emphasis and easier English explanation, and the target patterns are deliberately incorporated into the story with repetition. Once the content is fixed, the teacher refines her storytelling style through practice and keeps a copy of the content at hand for recall. If necessary, the teacher can record the story beforehand and plays it in class.

## **Tell the Story**

It is important to create an atmosphere that is comfortable and inviting before the storytelling. When telling the story, the teacher has to use vivid and clear language, adding sounds or character voices, with gestures and meaningful repetitions to assist understanding. The story is developed as a process of asking the students questions and directing the story as the students provide answers. So the students may need some time to feel, to reflect and to predict.

When the story progresses, the teacher writes guide words and key structures on board in order of the story to accentuate new vocabulary and grammar points. A story will be altered by the storyteller's choice of setting and details and by the relationship she established with her audience. Remember that all teachers have different strengths and tools to develop their own styles, that the teacher doesn't have to be perfect in telling a story, and that warmth and enthusiasm are always the vital tools.

### **Follow-up Activities**

After the students have been listening to the story and speaking to respond to the teacher, some reading activities like true or false, multiple-choice, rearrangement and short-answer questions or writing activities like blank-filling, cloze paragraphs, paraphrasing and structure practice can be provided for the students to review what they have learned. Other oral activities may include choral reading, story fill-in, retelling or role-playing the story. For a higher-level writing skill development, the teacher may ask her students to re-write the story from a different perspective or change the plot so that the ending is different.

### **Record Keeping**

A simple database, which illustrates genres, the levels, and important elements, offers an easier search for later use. The following is a suggested form.

Title	
Author	
Source	
Running Time	
Audience	
Characters	
Important Elements	
Brief Synopsis	
Index by Genres	

## Suggestions

The storytelling approach demands much preparation on the teacher's part as well as other video and audio aids, and it is confined to the genres of learning materials. Thus, it is suggested to select texts for occasional implementation to enrich or add variety to English classes. Also, to avoid frustration, the story can be told either in sole English or in the switch of English and Chinese according to the students' English proficiency. Though storytelling develops the students' four skills at a time, the teacher has to decide the priority with regard to the students' general competence. When a teacher's collection of storytelling database is complete, he or she is recommended to organize a student club, so that the club members are offered the opportunity to develop their storytelling and performing skills.

### A Demonstration of Storytelling as Text Presentation

#### Find the Story

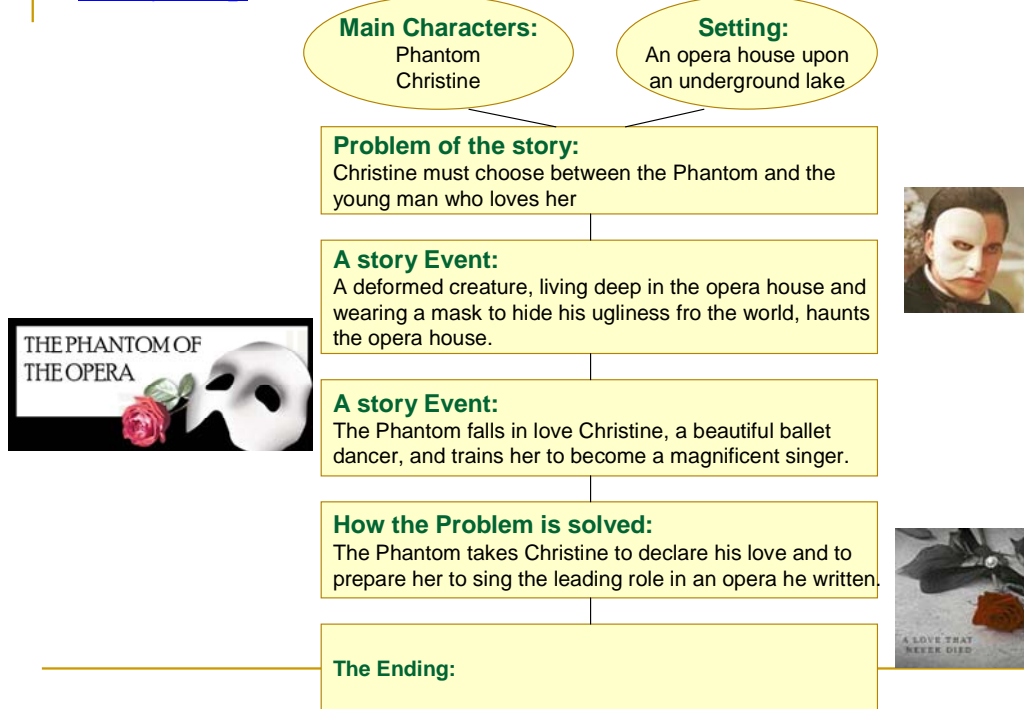
#### Lungteng English Reader 5

Lesson	Title	Storytelling
1	Earthquake! Predict, Prepare, Prevent	
2	"See Spot Run": Teaching My Grandmother to Read	
3	The Lady or the Tiger?	☆
4	The Coming of a Silent Spring	
5	Three Days to See	
6	The Music of the Phantom	☆
7	DNA—A Blueprint for Life	
8	A Christmas Carol: A Version for Readers' Theater	☆
9	Should History Be Told by Tribes or by Museums?	
10	I Have a Dream	



## Learn the Story

### 1. Story Map of “The Music of the Phantom”



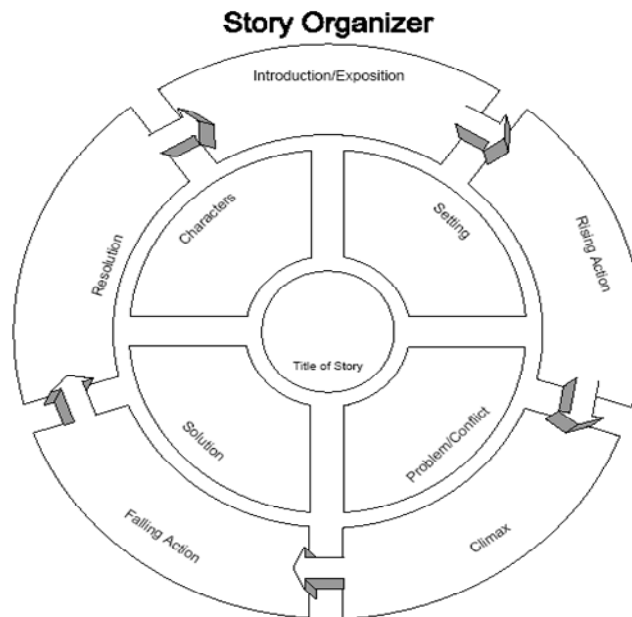
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### 2. Major Sequences of “The Music of the Phantom”

<b>Exposition</b>	A phantom haunts the opera house of several mysterious qualities.
<b>Rising Action</b>	The deformed phantom falls in love with a beautiful young ballet dancer and trained her to become a magnificent singer.
<b>Problem/Conflict</b>	The new owner of the opera house, viscount Raoul, reunites with Christine. They are attracted to each other.
<b>Climax</b>	The Phantom takes Christine to the underground lake to declare his love and to prepare her to sing the leading role in an opera he has written
<b>Falling Action</b>	Christine accepts the Phantom’s love to save Raoul, which caused great remorse to the Phantom.
<b>Solution/Ending</b>	The Phantom releases Christine and Raoul. When the underground lake is exposed to the world, the Phantom disappears.

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### 3. Skeleton Reminder of “The Music of the Phantom”



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### Prepare the Story

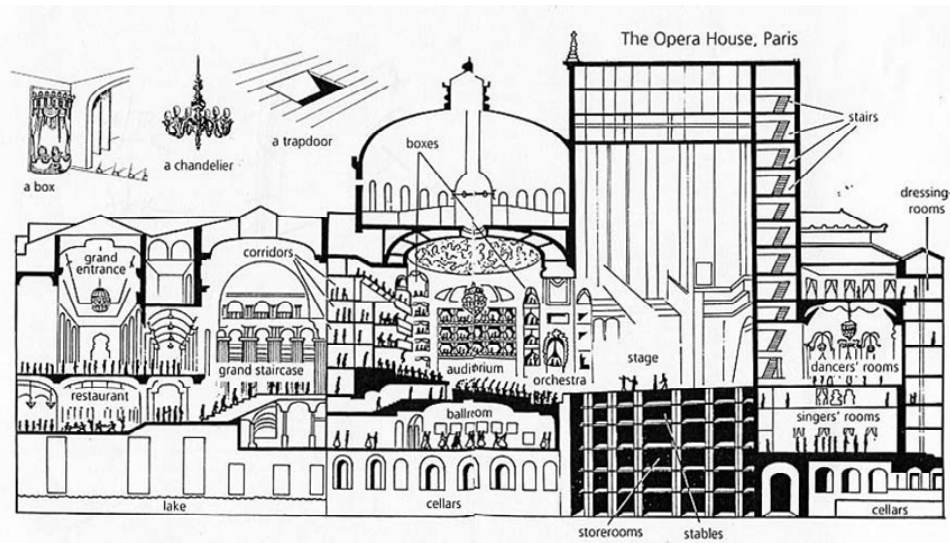
#### 1. Target Words and Patterns

<b>Words</b>	dam (v), underground (a), siege (n), chandelier (n), haunt (v), mask (n), deformed (a), ballet (n), magnificent (a), declare (v), leading (a), savor (v), intoxicating (a), sensation (n)
<b>Phrases</b>	take place, take refuge, comings and goings, hide...from, long to, feel attraction to, be confused about, surrender to, choose between, under such circumstances, have no choice but to, on the contrary
<b>Patterns</b>	Reversed Sentences: 1. Deep beneath the opera house is a lake. 2. Only then can you belong to me.

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## 2. Pictures of the Scenes in Mind

### (1) The opera house



dam (v), underground (a), siege (n), chandelier (n), take place, take refuge

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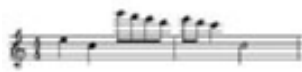
### (2) A phantom haunts the opera house and falls in love with Christine



ballet (n), magnificent (a), comings and goings, hide...from, in the depths of, feel attraction to, be confused about,

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(3) The Phantom takes Christine to the underground lake to declare his love.



The Music of the Night



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### 3. Copy of the Content

This is a ghost story as well as a love story. It took place a century ago in the opera house in Paris. The opera house has three special qualities. The first feature is on its construction. Beneath the opera house is a lake. The opera house was built by damming up an underground lake. Second, it is said that during the siege of Paris in a war, many citizens took refuge below the opera house and died there. Third, some time later, in a performance, a great chandelier on the ceiling of the opera house fell to the floor and killed a number of audience.

**Q: With the three qualities, what do you feel about the opera house?**

Well, the place did create a spooky feeling. And strange things did happen. One day, the opera managers received a letter from nowhere, asking for a large amount of money and a reservation of seat for performances. At first, the managers didn't take it seriously. However, unfortunate events happened one after another. The theater workers had accidents, the leading singer lost her voice, and the comings and going of a shadow scared the people in the opera house. One of the workers even said that he had seen the ghost wearing a mask. Gradually, the legend grew that a phantom had haunted the opera house.

**Q: If there were really a phantom, why did he wear a mask?**

Because this man was born with a deformed face, which made him ugly. He wore the mask to hide his ugliness from the world.

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**Q: If he had to hide himself, why did he hide around the opera house?**

Because he was a lover of music, and he was so talented that he could write operas by himself. By living under the opera house, he could attend performances of the opera.

It was in those performances that the phantom fell in love with a beautiful young ballet dancer, Christine, and got close to her by teaching her to sing. Christine had longed to become a magnificent opera singer. Christine's first teacher was her father, who died when she was 14 but promised her that she would receive singing lesson from "the Angel of Music." So when the Phantom mysteriously appeared to teach her singing, she felt strange attraction to him and was confused about his identity.

**Q: Who did Christine think the Phantom to be?**

Hmm, she thought the Phantom "the Angel of Music." But one day in the theater came a new owner, a young handsome man named Raoul, who immediately recognized Christine. They had known each other since childhood. Raoul fell in love with Christine and proposed love to her.

**Q: Now that the Phantom had a rival, what would he do?**

The phantom took Christine to his underground lake, where he declared his love and showed Christine the opera he had written, saying that Christine was prepared to sing the leading role. Here comes the climax of the story. The Phantom sang the famous song "The Music of the Night." In the song, he asked Christine to stay with him in the darkness of night and to sing only his music. He also asked Christine to surrender to the power of his music, and to savor each intoxicating sensation they shared together.

Now I would like you to listen to the Phantom's singing and tell me how you feel.

**Q: If you were Christine, would you be moved by Phantom's love declaration?**

Christine was quite enchanted with the haunting moment. She admired the Phantom's talents, appreciated his affection, but she was also scared. Then she returned to the reality and had to choose between the Phantom and Raoul.

**Q: Would Christine choose the Phantom or Raoul?**

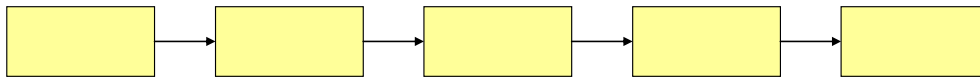
As most young girls would, Christine chose Raoul. And this caused great pain to the Phantom. The Phantom couldn't admit defeat and took revenge on the opera house. He disconnected the chandelier from the ceiling, killing a number of audience. Then he kidnapped Christine to the underground lake. Raoul followed them to rescue Christine, only to be captured by the Phantom. The Phantom threatened Christine to stay with him or he would kill Raoul.

**Q: If you were Christine, would you say yes?**

Under such circumstances, Christine had no choice but to promise the Phantom. Strangely enough, at the moment the Phantom felt great remorse. He did not keep Christine; on the contrary, he released both of them. The Paris police discovered the underground place but no one was there. Ever since, no one knew what happened to the Phantom or where he had gone.

**Follow-up Activities**

**Events Rearrangement:** Read the text and then rearrange the events of “The Phantom of the Opera” in order of time.

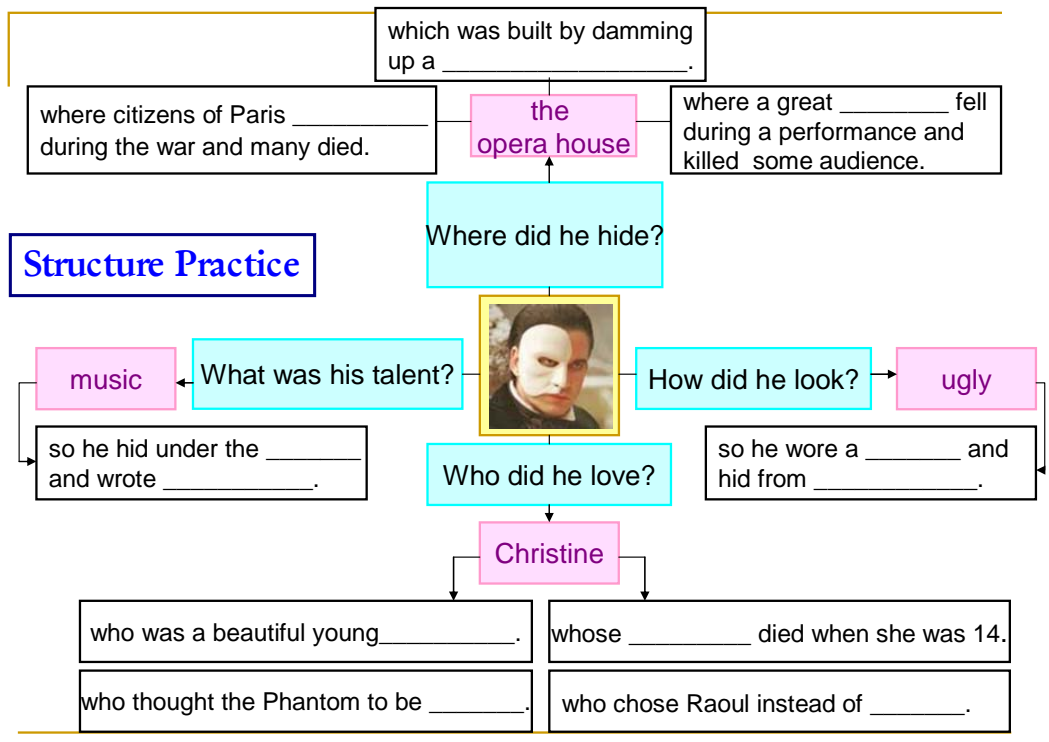


- A talkie
- A silent
- A movie
- A novel
- A musical

**Reading Activity**

**Short-answer Questions:**

1. Who was the author of “The Phantom of the Opera?”
2. In what language was “The Phantom of the Opera” written?
3. Who brought the greatest fame for “The Phantom of the Opera?”
4. Where was “The Phantom of the Opera” first put on stage?
5. Where was “The Phantom of the Opera” still running on stage?
6. When was “The Phantom of the Opera” staged in Taiwan?



**Record Keeping**

The simple database offers a easier search for later use.

<b>Title</b>	The Phantom of the Opera
<b>Author</b>	Gaston Leroux
<b>Source</b>	Book, Movie & Musical
<b>Running Time</b>	50 mins
<b>Audience</b>	Intermediate & Advanced
<b>Character</b>	The Phantom, Christine & Raoul
<b>Important Elements</b>	The evolution of "The Phantom of the Opera", from a book to a silent, a talkie, a stage musical and finally a movie.
<b>Brief Synopsis</b>	A disfigured musical genius, hidden away in the Paris Opera House, terrorizes the opera company for the unwitting benefit of a young ballet dancer whom he trains and loves.
<b>Index by Genres</b>	Drama, Thriller, Musical

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