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American English

SYTHESIZING STORY ELEMENTS
SAYURI'S STORY PUZZLE ACTIVITY

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CRITICAL THINKING AND READING WITH
WHY ENGLISH? – COMICS FOR THE CLASSROOM

This reading and speaking activity uses *Sayuri's Story* from *Why English? – Comics for the Classroom*. Comics can be a fantastic way to engage students in reading comprehension activities. Comics can provide opportunities for students to read new words and learn vocabulary while receiving support from the visual contexts the art provides. For more on comics in the classroom check out - **English Teaching Forum 2006, Volume 44, Number 1.**

Sayuri's Story contains dialogue between the characters as well as narration from the boy. This narration explains the thoughts of the boy, describing the situation to the reader. Understanding this narration and where it fits in the overall story requires students to think critically about the story and how the narration connects the parts of the story together.

This activity is designed to encourage students to develop critical thinking skills and develop skills in using images to understand the context of English sentences. Before reading, students use visuals from the comic to establish the context and story of the comic. This scanning of the visuals prior to reading the comic dialogue is an effective way to prepare students for words they may encounter in the text.

After working with the images and dialogue, students receive the narration of the story. As students match the narration blocks to the story panels, they must think critically to connect the images, dialogue, and narration. This final activity of matching the narration to the panels encourages students to synthesize the information they gathered first through the images, then through the dialogue, and finally through the narration.

Before starting this lesson it is helpful to know the following comic book vocabulary:
Panel – Each of the squares that contains artwork and writing is known as a panel
Dialogue – Words 'spoken' by the character. Dialogue is written inside of a bubble shape ⬭
Narration – Words that explain the story but are not spoken by the characters. Narration is written
       inside a block shape ▭

LEVEL

High Intermediate to Advanced

LANGUAGE FOCUS

Reading
- Comprehension – main ideas and details
- Using visuals – using images to understand context
- Critical thinking – making predictions about a reading
- Synthesizing – combining elements of a story into a cohesive unit

GOALS

Students will

- Make pre-reading predications about the story based on information provided by the artwork
- Make predictions about vocabulary found in the story using context clues provided by the artwork
- Connect story narration to artwork and dialogue found in the story

MATERIALS

- *Why English? Comics for the Classroom – Sayuri's Story*
- *Sayuri's Story* Comic Panels - (found at the end of this activity)
- *Sayuri's Story* Answer Keys

PREPARATION

1) Print out copies of the *Sayuri's Story* comic panels. Make enough copies depending on how the class is organized (individuals/pairs/small groups)
2) Print out copies of the *Sayuri's Story Puzzle Pieces*. Make enough copies depending on how the class is organized (individuals/pairs/small groups)
3) Cut the *Sayuri's Story Puzzle Pieces* into individual boxes so that they can be matched to the blank squares in the *Sayuri's Story* comic pages.

PROCEDURE

1) Give each pair or small group* the *Sayuri's Story* comic panels. Each page of the comic has a number of narration panels that are blank.
2) Allow the students 30 seconds to scan the images in the story then flip the pages over so they cannot see the story.
3) In their pairs/small groups have the students discuss the plot of the comic without looking. After the pairs/small groups have discussed, encourage them to share their idea with the whole class. Do all the pairs/small groups have the same interpretation of the images?
4) Tell the pairs/small groups to flip the pages back over and this time to read the dialogue in the story. Circulate through the classroom to assist students with vocabulary as needed.
5) Now that the students have scanned the images and read the dialogues, have students discuss the story again, this time providing more details on the story such as what the boy does to show his love for Sayuri. Were their initial predications of the story correct?
   a. For more advanced classes, use the expansion activity instructions from this point forward.
6) Ask the students why the comic has empty blocks. What goes in these blocks? Elicit that these blocks contain narration to the story. Tell students they are going to match the narration to the correct panel of the story.
7) Give each pair or small group the *Sayuri's Story* Puzzle Pieces found in Appendix 1.
8) Have the students match the puzzle pieces to the correct narration blocks in the comic. As groups finish the task, encourage the groups to check their answers with other pairs/groups.
9) Once students have completed the matching task, facilitate a class discussion in which students share their interpretation of the story. Begin the discussion by asking the following questions:
   a. Do you think Sayuri remembers the boy?
   b. How long has it been since Sayuri and the boy last met?
   c. What do you think happens with the boy and Sayuri?

*This activity could be completed with each student working alone; however pairs/small groups allow for more speaking opportunities.

Expansion Activity
1. Now that students have scanned the images and read the dialogues, have them fill in the empty narration boxes found within the comic with their own narration. Remind students that this narration represents the thoughts of the boy. Once finished, encourage the students to share their narration sentences with other pairs/small groups.
    a. Facilitate a class discussion pairs/small groups share their sentences with the class
    b. As a class, select/vote for the best or funniest sentences written for each narration block. Use these to create a class version of the narration for *Sayuri's Story*
2. Give each pair or small group the *Sayuri's Story* Puzzle Pieces from Appendix 1.
3. Have the students match the puzzle pieces to the correct narration blocks in the comic. As groups finish the task, encourage the groups to compare the narration sentences to the ones they selected in step 1b. Are the sentences similar or different? How so?
4. Once students have completed the matching task, facilitate a class discussion in which students share their interpretation of the story. What do they think happens with the boy and Sayuri?
5. For homework (or an additional class activity) have the students write a short paragraph on what happens after the comic ends.

Appendix 1 – Sayuri's Story Narration Blocks

Cut out these blocks for each student pair/group. The numbers correspond to the correct narration block in the Sayuri Answer Keys found in Appendix 2.

1
| Well here I am in front of you. So close after so many years. It seems like yesterday when I met you. |

2
| I was just a troublesome kid with no worries. |

3
| I wasn't the best in my English class, but I knew a few tricks. |

4
| However, I had a bad time because I didn't understand some signs in English. |

5
| Until one day a new neighbor arrived and I fell in love. |

6
| My friends teased me, but I didn't care. I wanted to meet her. |

7
| One day I got a big surprise. She spoke in English and I didn't understand. |

8
| After that, each day I gave her flowers. |

9
| We communicated by signs. She gave me her doll, but I didn't understand what she tried to say with that. |

10
| Finally, I understood. She had to go back to her country. |

11
| Since then I studied English a lot. I discovered how interesting Sayuri's language was. |

12
| Now that I live in the U.S. I could find her. |

13
| Now I know English and after many years I will finally be able to talk to you. |