

FEAR, Sci-Fi and Videotape: Toward Second Language Acquisition “The Storytelling Exercise”

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CAUTIONARY NOTE

I must warn you about this exercise. First of all, a Speech teacher wrote this! You know the type . . . tells people what they need to do and then let's them figure out how to do it. Some say we don't work as hard as they do. I say we expend energy at a more economical rate. There won't be a lot of papers to grade. This doesn't have a lot of lecture because it does not have a lot of instruction to it. The student will be doing a lot of the work on his or her own so you may have a little more fun. There may also be a bit of distress on the part of the students participating in this exercise and there is not going to be a whole lot you can do to stop it because they will be doing it to themselves. Though you may wish to save them, you may only offer suggestion and encouragement and don't forget those deadlines. This exercise may require an amount of patience in order that students are allowed to look for good answers to tough questions on their own and be given help only when they ask for it. Did I mention that at some point, you might not know what's going on? The worst part is that I haven't found a lot of studies on this technique and I have been looking so this may be “cutting edge” stuff, ergo you could be blazing a new trail. All I can tell you is that it works!

THE PREMISE

Though I have been an educator for 22 years, I am NOT writing this teaching unit because of that. There are other factors that led up to this. Before becoming a teacher, the acting bug bit me and it carried me through a number of production projects both as an actor on stage, a technician backstage and later as a Theatre teacher directing young people in pursuit of their craft. While working my way through college, I was a disk jockey/newsman for a medium market radio station in Corpus Christi, Texas. I have been involved with or taken part in a number of high-pressure speaking situations. Thanks to my teaching experiences, I have worked with and had a chance to observe a fairly wide spectrum of Texas' student population; from emotionally disturbed children in a self-contained classroom in Corpus Christi to Laredo border children (everyone in that school was an ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher, like it or not) to the more worldly students of Bellaire High in Houston. I am (and have been for four years) now an ESL “Communication Applications” (the *new* name for Speech) teacher. I have been able to observe an interesting number of students (both regular and ESL) in high-pressure (the pressure is *high* because I enhance it.) speaking situations.

This should now bring us to the inevitable question you, the reader, are now probably thinking, “So?” SO, I feel that because of this unusual combination of experiences, I have

perhaps stumbled onto something that could offer teachers another approach in developing more effective second language acquisition technique in and for their language-challenged students. (Did you notice that I didn't say English?) Student populations all over the country are becoming more and more culturally diverse. In schools where there are no programs for students who are new to this country, the prospect of entering a class and trying to learn the subject while learning the language can be traumatic to say the least. Even the schools that do have special programs for these students find that when the student tests out of the program, the adjustment to regular curriculum can be difficult. Couple that with the number of students who enter these programs with sometimes very little formal education and are quite advanced in years to enter an 18 year and younger facility.

These students need language acquisition tools right now in order to better decode their new language, which could be quite difficult to do (the English language comes to mind), and better survive in the working world which their situations, generally, force them into. How many students have you seen isolated by their lack of understanding of your culture? How many opportunities do you suppose they are given to display any of the facets of their culture? This exercise is one of those opportunities. I think, with minor adaptation on the part of you, the instructor, this exercise can work for anyone, anywhere and, if you use your imagination, in almost any subject.

Okay, so now you know that you have an instructional theory. What does science fiction have to do with it? Aside from Sci-Fi being one of my favorite forms of escape literature (one should mix a little pleasure with business), science fiction could be considered the thinking person's fairy tale. The mere fact that the story hasn't happened yet and yet could potentially happen is the reason, I think, that so many people are attracted to the genre. Numerous authors have painted the future in so many hues from rosy all the way to black. I also think that once young people are thinking more about what could be, they think less about what is happening right here right now. Thanks to the fact that the far-distant future is still in many cases far and distant, the possibilities for story lines are virtually inexhaustible. Therefore material should not be hard to come by.

Theatre, broadcasting, human nature and a love of science fiction all play a part in the *Sci-fi Storytelling Exercise*. These components will be mentioned again and again as part of the explanation as to why I feel this unit will work.

As stated before, I teach ESL Communication Applications, which is the new name for an old class. I think it only fair to tell you that the course known by the names Communication Applications, Public Speaking, Communication Theory or just plain Speech is probably one of the most dreadful situations any person, particularly a novice speaker of a language, can face. Imagine the feeling of not being proficient in a language and then imagine being told that you will be telling a story to a class. It's not very hard is it? Let's plop a monolingual American in a Bangkok High School and give them a month to prepare. You probably even feel uncomfortable just reading about it. Add to that

feeling, my telling the student that I am more interested in what the audience understood than what the student said. Now it's not enough that the student says it, it has to also be communicated successfully. This is very different from the "sit and get" that students are more acquainted with. The different type of situation is what brings about student (and teacher) interest in such a project.

For years I heard speeches (in regular classes) that I, frankly, considered somewhat bland and colorless. In the ESL class, I found the problem to be more pronounced. Students from many countries would stand there and mouth words that they had recently learned (or plagiarized if you wish) hoping that they got it right. I would try to coach them on the use of nonverbal technique such as gesture, facial expression and movement but I think the theoretical was easier for me to explain than the practical was for them to demonstrate. I tried modeling behaviors to help them better understand the use of the technique but those that tried them seemed to be doing impressions of me (or lampoons). They needed some kind of a stepping-stone or mirror to help them see and understand something that most people don't even think about.

At this point I felt it would be best to look to my other major, theatre, and see if there was anything there I could use to help my students along. I remembered reading in Sir Lawrence Olivier's autobiography that he had once had a young director removed from his position at the "Old Vic" acting company because the director was using a more "organic" directing style which called for the actor's blocking (stage movements) to come from and during the rehearsal process. Olivier would have none of it. According to my professor at the time, Dr. Dennis Maganza, Olivier's behavior was the result of his personal dread of forgetting his lines. He needed his blocking as quickly as possible to help with his memorization. Olivier complained and the director, a young man named John Guilgud, was sacked.

Even I, and I don't particularly fear the organic method, feel a bit more comfortable when I get early blocking because it's easier to remember lines when I have a series of active **markers** for when to say those lines. I would work my lines into a move and that would change the way I did the line as well as the move. After that, the line and move would support each other. If ever I would forget a line, the blocking would help me either remember the line or if not, I could develop a **compensator** on the spot because my actions told me what had to happen.

When I started directing, I, once again, found that my actors moved more easily and efficiently when they had their blocking and their scenes came together faster. This led me to this theory. It is my belief that when a person learns a language with his/her whole body (verbal and nonverbal), that acquisition of said language would be more complete than if one concentrated solely on the word (verbal). The verbal aspect would also be greatly enhanced as the development of compensation mechanisms causes a person's language to become more flexible.

With this theory in hand, I set out to find methodology to help me pursue it. I happened upon a text on technique by Muriel Saville-Troike (125) that helped me in a number of ways. I found many methods that were close to some that I had already developed. But, because they were written with small children in mind, they were either too regimented or were too focused to allow the student to examine the larger issues. However, I still felt they contained sound ideas. I found researchers like Susan Kellerman (239), who referred to nonverbal activity as “kinesic behavior” saying that it was important to the encoding/decoding process and John Asher (39) who referred to it as Total Physical Response or TPR. Kellerman (253) concluded, “Kinesic behavior must surely be included in the language learning process” and yet did not go into much detail as to how. She did, however, confirm that I was headed in the right direction.

Though I felt that Asher was not exactly what I was looking for (his exercises lacked a certain spontaneity that appeals to me yet I could see how the students could adapt these exercises into their own personal experience), he said a number of things that did appeal to me. He wrote that there was not just one way to administer his method. Asher called for “variety” adding that “the optimal combination will vary from instructor to instructor and class to class” (28). When I read that, I began to think in terms of adaptation. How could I incorporate nonverbal theory of the time with some of the techniques that I had found on my own?

There was an additional problem. The nonverbal technique had to be accessible to any student regardless of where that student was in terms of language development. One needs to remember that at no time were there any less than five different nationalities in the sheltered classes I taught and the levels involved were from intermediate to advanced. This is very uneven terrain to drive a lesson through. I decided that I would not use the tried and true directing method of “feeding” them the blocking or the nonverbal behaviors in order that they had something to work with. Since kinesic behavior is a universal mode of expression (Kendon 104), I decided that would be the focus of my approach. I would try and get them to realize their own nonverbal technique from their individual cultures and use that knowledge as a springboard for this project.

ABOUT NONVERBAL BEHAVIORS . . .

Before going into the nonverbal aspect of the exercise, it would probably be good idea to establish what nonverbal behavior is. Nonverbal communication is everything used to communicate other than the actual words or symbols. Nonverbal includes vocal expression technique, or paralanguage as one of my old textbooks called it (Verderber 40), such as volume, diction, pause, tone, intensity, pitch and rate; physical expression such as eye contact, facial expression, gesture and movement; and technical enhancers such as visual aids (2-D and 3-D), Properties (Props) and costuming.

An example would be the word “Help.” It can be said many different ways and can elicit many responses depending upon how it is said. When screamed at the top of one’s

voice with a facial expression of utter horror, the word can be a call for immediate assistance. When said in a sigh with upturned eyes, it could be a plea for self-control instead of frustration. Language does not just consist of the word and its meaning, though it is a necessary part. Language is heavily dependent upon all the wonderful nuances that color and flavor language, just as a gourmet chef knows exactly what herb or spice will blend to create the flavor he/she wants. Only with this total understanding can anyone truly master a language.

In his article “Issues in Teaching Pragmatics, Prosody, and Non-Verbal Communication,” Daniel Hurley states “each culture has a set of norms regarding the appropriateness of different types of expressions and conversational strategies, and the use of pitch, loudness, gestures, eye contact and other non-verbal elements of communicative acts” (259). With this in mind, it would seem logical to evaluate your students’ awareness of this aspect of communication. Introduce the students to a language they have spoken all their lives and yet, probably, never paid attention to. Ask them if they use hand gestures or if their people “talk with their hands” in the country where they live or where they are from (I get exchange students too). If they are not sure, ask them to ask their parents. Ask them if they have an expression for the teetering wave of the hand that means “So-so.” I found out from my Chinese students that the Chinese have a verbal expression for “so-so” that does not have a gesture. Ask them if they have noticed that Americans like to yell a lot. See if their cultures yell too. Ask them why they yell if they do. Have them tell you things like “I don’t know” or “What’s that?” without using the actual words.

At this point you should be able to list and explain the nonverbal techniques mentioned further in this section. Use as many (or as few) of the techniques as you wish. Bear in mind that you are only cataloguing movements that are already theirs. Assure them that they already know everything they need to know to be successful. They need to see that language by itself is good but **whole body** language is better. In the student’s native language, as well as the second language, the student is in the process of learning and during this process “compensatory strategies are common” (Kellerman 251). By causing the student to look at the nonverbal side of communication, they unconsciously (or consciously if you wish) develop new types of language compensation devices to aid he/she in both understanding and being understood. All they need now is to know when to use the skills they possess.

Helping people see what they have been doing unconsciously all their lives is sometimes difficult. Once they see what it is and why it works, they can compare it to something back home. If you need some help with those nonverbal techniques, here are some techniques I have used. Feel free to use these to develop others:

- Volume – Loudness or softness of your voice. “What kind of person are you? Loud or soft?” Did you ever know any really loud (or soft-spoken) people?

- Diction – The shaping and forming of words. “Rubber baby buggy bumpers; Round and round the rugged rock the ragged rascal ran; or She sells seashells by the seashore” are good exercise phrases and there are many more.
- Pause – stopping for effect, not to be confused with vocalized pauses or “uh.” There is a very thin line between the “uh” of deep thought and the “uh” of the lost mind.
- Tone – the feeling given to something. Do you say, “How are you doing?” the same way at a ball game as you do at a funeral or a school?
- Intensity – The weight given to words. *Jack and the Beanstalk*’s Giant has the line, “Fee, fi, fo, fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman. Be he alive or be he dead, I’ll grind his bones to make my bread.” This line must be said with a certain intensity in order to make it more “Giant-like.”
- Pitch – Highness or lowness of your voice. “The English don’t yell when they get mad, they go up in pitch.”
- Rate – The speed that you speak. “People can only hear so fast.” There are some TV commercials that feature actors that have the ability to speak very fast, notably “Staples.”
- Eye contact – Looking directly at someone or a group of people. “When you really want someone to listen to you, do you look right at him or her or away?”
- Facial expression – The facial conveyance of feeling. “Have you ever seen someone who looked very sad and when you asked them what was wrong, they said, ‘nothing.’” Did you know that roboticists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology are working on Facial Expression for robots so the robot will look like it is listening thus making them appear more user friendly. Why would they go through all that trouble? (Mason 2003).
- Gesture – Using parts of the body to express a feeling or idea. “How do most people say ‘I don’t know’ or ‘OK’ or ‘So-so’ or ‘Let’s go’ in your country?” How about this one, “The fish was thiiiiis big”?
- Movement – using position to express a feeling or idea. “When you really want someone to believe you, do you move toward them or away from them? When you don’t care what someone thinks, do you move toward them or away from them?”
- Visual aids (2-D and 3-D) – this includes pictures, models, and other media used. Maybe some basic art courses (like how to draw the **stick figure**) might be in order. Don’t forget bubble people, they’re fun too!
- Properties (Props) – There are a number of accessories that aid in creating different characters like glasses, a pipe, a monocle or a hat. These are pretty cheap to buy and can be kept on hand on a “prop table” located in a convenient location.
- Costuming – Along these same lines, a simple piece of fabric can be a sling, a shawl, a skirt or sash.

Ordinarily, I would say to let their imaginations go and see what they come up with; but I know that nurturing part of some of you is overwhelming, so feel free to get your hands dirty.

THOSE WONDERFUL INGREDIENTS

The public speaking experience brings with it a certain anxiety that earns it the title of “most widespread unreasonable fear in the world.” This is a fear that most people feel when asked to speak in public, not life threatening yet very real. This fear, if acknowledged, can be the first tool in enhancing the quality of student effort. If used skillfully, it can even boost participation by students. Make the students aware of fear and its effects and try to get them to focus on it. Make fear the problem that must be faced, if not resolved. Making the project (Project. Hmmm. Sounds good!) a very big deal in the war against fear does this. Inform the student that the assignment is just the tip of the iceberg. Tell them that there are going to be a number of obstacles that they are going to have to deal with and, hopefully, overcome during this project. Assure them that the obstacles are there to exert pressure or “laboratory fear” on them to test their ability “under fire.”

A video camera regardless of the size or type or cost is a wonderful piece of anxiety-causing equipment. The “unblinking eye,” as Dan Rather once described it, allows anxiety to grow while the student waits to begin. Afterwards, the video can be used as a teaching tool (Saville-Troike 125). Remember that this procedure cannot be just the simple press of a button. In order to give the project the consideration it deserves, a real “shooting” procedure should be established. This takes the pressure off the instructor and puts it on the performer where it belongs. By this time they should have already have seen how they look on tape. (If they haven’t, maybe you could walk around the room with the camera in hand asking them to say something and then play it back for the class to watch.) Make sure that you give them instructions on how to “shoot” the story. Here are some suggestions you might consider:

- We must stop persecuting students whose last name begins with first or last letters of the alphabet. Leave the Alvarez and Zunigas alone. Order for the shooting schedule should be chosen at random in order to eliminate blame on anyone (other than fate) as to why someone was chosen first. I have my students write their names on the backs of pages torn from one of those tear off calendars, have them fold it the same way so my hand is not attracted to a “different” shape and then put them all in a common plastic grocery bag with the words “Magic Bag Period #.” I use it for everything where students must do something in a certain order. Shake it up and make the drawing of names an event! Drum roll, please.
- The student who is chosen to go first could be offered the option of being cameraperson and tape the other speakers. This allows you time to pay attention to classroom behavior and the like while the first speaker gets a little bonus for doing the deed. Make sure the cameraperson has a set of procedures to follow also in order that they pay more attention to their job. “Watch the subject through the

lens, not from the side.” You might also want to explain camera terms like “pan left-pan right” (side to side camera movement), “tilt up-tilt down”(up and down camera movement), and “zoom in and zoom out” (I like a full-body shot as opposed to waist up). It gives them a little more to do.

- The students should look at their audience, not at the camera. They need to “pretend” the camera is not there. If they have trouble doing this, call “cut” and shoot it again until the subject executes it.
- If the performer has any movement instructions for the camera before he/she begins (for example, “I am going to walk all the way to the wall” or “I will put the poster on the easel and point to it), they need to ask the cameraperson (using the aforementioned film jargon) so the cameraperson can better accommodate them. This is also good for the performer, as they have moved past pleasing you, the instructor. These performers have a plan of their own.
- Count down to the “Go” by saying out loud, “Five... Four... Three... then silently hold up two fingers then one forefinger and then point with the forefinger to signal “Go.” Inform the student that he/she *should* (if not *will*) be able to see this signal with their peripheral vision. If the students have trouble understanding your instructions (or the word peripheral) run a trial exercise for them so they can try it out.
- If they do anything out of line (the list of possibilities can be endless) call “Cut” and reshoot. Keep those bloopers as they could supply some good entertainment for the class and show them the importance of staying at it until it is done.
- Remind the audience that you are recording their responses as well so they should applaud enthusiastically and “on cue,” both at the beginning and at the end of the performance. Talk about the use of applause signs in radio and television and then, if you wish, have them make some “applause” or “cheer” cue cards. You can assign a student to the “Applause” sign for the speeches. Tell everyone to applaud for everyone.
- If the performer doesn’t like the way the first taping went, don’t waste it. These students are looking for quality in their own work Allow them to reshoot as many times as you wish. I think one reshoot is fine; others like two...whatever.

This should start to pique their interest. You might even want to run a mock shoot just to get the feel of it. Before you get to the shoot, there are some preparations that can be made to keep the upcoming event on their minds.

- Make sure that you make a shooting schedule and post it in a visible location so they know when they face the camera. Anticipation...
- Remind them that practice can make the difference between a well executed move and a poorly executed one. Any practice, even a little practice, is better than no practice at all. So encourage them to run it a few times before the real thing. Offer them your time to look at possible methods on an individual basis.

- If you feel like making them aware of what they have, run a “timed read.” They should all have their material in class for this one. You might want to give a grade for the ones who have it there ready and not for what shape it is in. Instruct them to all read their story at their desks, out loud, at the same time. If you want them to stand by their desk, go ahead. If all of them read together, no one will be able to listen to anyone. Yes, the room is going to get noisy. Set your stopwatch or chronometer to whatever time period you specified in your instructions and call “Go.” Let them know when they have reached the end of the time period. If anyone runs out of material to read before the time period ends, inform the student that he/she needs more material to make time. You could suggest they pick another story or if time doesn’t allow, suggest they write an introduction to prepare the audience for what they are about to say.
- While a speaker is performing, allow the next speaker to go outside the room (into the hallway or another room) to prepare for their performance. I tell them that they will have time to give themselves a pep talk and check to make sure they have everything on their body in the correct place. The speaker after will be in charge of calling in the waiting speaker.
- In order to discourage students from bringing large or complicated technical items to class, there are two rules: the “Grocery Bag” rule which states that if the student cannot bring it all in one standard paper grocery bag, he/she can’t bring it; and the 1-minute set-up/1-minute strike rule which states that the student can only have one minute to set-up and one minute to take down any technical aids. This is used to even the playing field when it comes to imagination boundaries and equipment affordability. The speed required to complete the task on time adds a bit of stress to things as well and it helps to keep your shooting schedule on schedule.
- If a performer is ready to go and is not able to perform his/her story, the teacher should store all of their equipment until the next performance day and they should be first. It was not the student’s fault that he/she was not able to perform; therefore, the student should not be penalized by having to lug their stuff back and forth again.

Another item that really helps to enhance an “electric” atmosphere... Lighting. If you could get a couple of 500-watt Fresnels or Parcans (Lighting instruments) and some extension cords from the drama department, you can change your classroom into a production studio. Nothing makes the heart start pounding like stepping into a spotlight. Tell the class that you are trying to give them the feeling of stepping into the lights. Tell them to study the feeling.

Prepare the audience as well. Inform them that the more eyes are on the speaker, the more nervous the speaker will get as a result of the increased attention. Applause is a must as it signals the approach of the inevitable speaking assignment and it might even bolster some of them to want to do their best.

THE METHOD

Before you move them into the realm of performance, it might be prudent to give them a couple of assignments to allow them a chance to “get their feet wet.” Muriel Seville-Troike suggests telling the students “an incomplete story” and ask them for ending solutions (125). I usually start with a saying (anecdote, rule to live by, reminder) from the banks of philosophical thought that can be found in any culture that shares a common language. Pearls of wisdom from the students’ past that they have heard and remembered may also be used. After you are sure they know what a saying is and that they can get one, you can then tell them that you want them to say the saying in their native language using the gestures of the people in their country. All cultures use some form of kinesic behavior to communicate (Kendon 104). Make sure you encourage them to use any and/or all of the nonverbal techniques (See “About Nonverbal Behaviors...”) that they want to get the message across to the people in the room who do not speak their language and that *includes* the teacher.

As a way of enhancing the tension of the situation, tell them that you are going to place certain limitations. Inform them that certain people would run up there, speak for thirty seconds and run back to their seat; while others who have the “gift for gab” will stay up there for half the class period telling you a great deal about very little. That is the reason for rules. It helps the instructor to grade more thoroughly for both the aforementioned types of speakers. The first of these limitations to ensure the student has an interesting speaking experience: make sure you put a limit on how short and how long they can speak on the subject. It forces the short-winded speaker to work on enough material and the long-winded one to edit his/hers to fit the situation. For the first one you can go as low as 30 seconds and as high as 1 minute and 30 seconds. Penalties for going under or over time can range from disqualification/reshoot to points off depending on your situation. I make mine a pass/fail situation and allow them to try again as many times as they want to (they can do this publicly or privately during lunch, let’s say—I choose the latter) until they complete the time and give them partial credit (or full credit, if you wish—they did face the fire) when they make it. It is important that they become cognizant of time as an obstacle to overcome. This will become one of the many pressures that you are going to put on your students. They have to stay out there for a while to get to the “real show.”

After they complete the 1:30 saying, play the tape back and let them see what they look and sound like. After each of the performances, stop the tape and go over the checklist and see how many of the nonverbal techniques were used and check them off on a list. Ask the people in the class who do not speak the language of the speaker to tell you anything they might have seen as to what the saying was about. The speaker can then see how well the audience understood him. My classes even rank the speakers according to how effectively they got the message across. Sometimes they surprise me with their observations. Ranking can be a difficult task so make sure the students use the nonverbal checklist as a guide and allow them time to go over what was done to make one better

than another. They need to understand what good work is so they can more easily interpret it and therefore, better present it the next time.

Now that they have an idea of what is expected of them, you then have some in-class reading exercises to run in order to help them better understand the material they will be asked to interpret. The genre I chose for this exercise is Science Fiction. I consider the future, or alternate universes if you will, something that a great many young people all over the world think about. Most every country considers these subjects in some way. My country, the USA, in particular looks at them in most every way. I find the imagery in science fiction to be challenging to both understand and to interpret to an audience. The interpretation of this material will be especially difficult (or easy depending on how they look at it) because they will be describing things that exist only in the mind of the author of the story. Another plus of this exercise is that a student's mind cannot help but expand as it digests images from a time that has not yet come to pass.

As a precursor to the reading step, you might want to get a feeling for the way your students feel about things like the future, extraterrestrials, alternate environments and the like. First, there is a short discussion about outer space and extra-terrestrials and the possibility of their existence. I found that a large majority of my high schoolers had thought about the possibilities. We start talking about this planet and it's sun and how there are millions of other suns like ours and why those suns might have a planet like ours revolving around it. Once we have those thought juices flowing, an exercise might help channel those random thoughts into something more cohesive and coherent. At the end of this unit there are two short exercises, Sci-Fi Add-a-Line and Name that Extraterrestrial that could be of some help in this area.

Now it is time to look at some science fiction material. There are two types of people reading this article: those that read science fiction and those who don't. I'll talk to the one's who do first because they have less to do. Pick out your favorite stories or cuttings, but if you are working in a public school setting, beware of stories with racy excerpts. Young people tend to gravitate toward such material. If you are very familiar with your material, you can edit it for the time period you have thus saving your students a lot of grief. The more planning you put into the project, the less "stops and sputters" you'll have along the way. Now I'll move on to those who don't read science fiction. The joy of this genre is that it's never too late to read about the future. I would suggest that you start with an anthology of short stories by numerous authors and go over a story at a time. If the numbers are too overwhelming, you might start with the big names like Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Robert A. Heinlein and Arthur C. Clark (Bradbury's *Illustrated Man* and Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* were high school required reading at one time.)

As you and the class read some of the sample stories together, ask the students to explain what they think is going on. There are other ways to help them with their reading and to better understand the type of literature they are dealing with. A Reader's Theatre

method (or a quicker radio play method, if you wish) of performing might add to the interest to the piece. (How do you make a radio play? You'll need a computer and scanner and a little time.) You might try just taping the audio of the piece rather than the video. It might even make it more fun for them. Allowing them to work as a group also helps because they are not alone; they have a rudimentary support group like the cast in a play. (You might even try a competition for best radio play but that's another unit.) You might even donate the finished product to the local "Lighthouse for the Blind." I'm sure they wouldn't mind listening to or even evaluating the finished product. After completing a few stories, have the students pick a story to tell the class.

The story that the student selects has to meet certain criteria to receive approval. It should be a science fiction story. The minimum time limit on this exercise should be no less than 3 minutes. (This limit's amount can be changed according to the abilities of your class so feel free.) The story should use narration as well as dialogue in order that the participant deal with different character changes. This adds to the complexity of the assignment. They can translate the story into their language or they can choose a story from their country and say it, as they understood it; the point is that they need to say it, not read it. There should be some sort of imagery involved in the story that can be interpreted nonverbally. An instructor can create more restrictions or lessen them as they see fit. There are other genres that can and should be considered (action, children's, fantasy, western, etc.) and they would follow the same guidelines.

Now a word about grading... This type of grading can be difficult because of the swiftness of the spoken word. Do not let this bother you. In this type of assignment, it is very difficult to get something completely wrong when it is truly attempted. There are varying levels of success and you and your students need to look at this. They need to understand the value of the attempt. You might even equate an attempt with a passing grade. Any type of grading like this can be very subjective and errors in judgment might occur. All I ask is that you err on the side of the student. This is just a suggestion. You know the people you're working with.

One should, however, establish and enforce restrictions to ensure the exercise will be more manageable and students will be less likely to take "artistic license" and create a new story on the spot. The instructor should be familiar with every work that these students are going to perform. A "suggested reading list" comes to mind as a possible way of keeping the instructor's workload under control. It is much easier to determine interpretation effectiveness when one is familiar with the material. (I read science fiction as a diversion, thus the genre choice.) If you would prefer they choose their own, you might instruct them of the need for prior teacher approval of stories not on the list. This approval can be given in any number of ways. If the story is written in a language other than yours, have the student tell you the story, as they understand it. Make sure they know about time limits and the need for the story to fit into them. Cuttings or parts of stories sometimes work just fine. Make your rules as rigid as you wish but remember that a little flexibility can go a long way toward a student's success.

LESSON PLANS

Please do not think that anything on this page is etched in stone. Feel free to rearrange, substitute, or delete any part of this that will not fit or seems unrealistic.

For the sheltered ESL classroom (Estimated length of unit 17-28 days)

Lesson One

1. (1-3 days) Using the suggestions from “About Nonverbal Behaviors,” make students aware of different nonverbal techniques both here and in the countries and cultures that they come from. Draw for order of performance. Use this order for all rounds or change the order with each round; whatever you wish.
2. (2-3 days) Have them put together a 30 second “saying” (slogan, anecdote, motto, etc.) complete with explanation in their native language as to what it means or where it came from or both and more. Allow them to use any nonverbal method they can, including simple media devices within the room (chalk/dry eraser board, overhead projector, etc.). After each student completes their saying, those that do not speak the language must try and figure out what the saying was. The speaker will tell them if they are right or wrong. The audience members have the right to ask the speaker about any nonverbal gesture he/she might have used. This may help them better explain what they saw. Some gestures can be interpreted very differently from one country to another. Watch out for the answer, “I don’t know.” In this exercise, such an observation could be valid. If you need a grade for this exercise, I would make it a pass/fail with one retry if things should go wrong. “If you get up there and meet the time requirements, that’s an “A” in my book!” It is very important that the student succeed. When you think they’re pretty good at this, you may be ready to...

Lesson Two

1. (2-3 days) Have them put together another saying only this time it will three times as long (in this case, 1 minute 30 seconds) complete with explanation as to what it means or where it came from or both and more. Inform them that you will be taping them in order that you can better study what their work looks like. You might want to go over shooting schedule and taping rules and vernacular. (See “The Method”) Taping of students can begin at this time. Since the instructor is not doing any grading at this time (Pass/Fail), the instructor is the logical choice for cameraperson. At this time you can also start using the television jargon so they can get used to it.
2. (1-2 days) Watch the tape and have the students who don’t speak the language try used to figure out what the speaker was trying to say and how effectively they said it. If you think they can handle it, have them try ranking the speakers according to who used the most nonverbal clues effectively. You might enjoy how observant they can be. Find out who they think is the best. When they get through this, you can probably begin to....

Lesson Three

1. (3-5 days) Look over the material (science fiction stories) and go over a few using reader's theatre method or have them read in turn but get them to look at the concepts of the story and discuss them. This can be done with cuttings from longer stories or collections of short stories. During this time inform the students that they will be interpreting a story and that they will need to pick one in 2 days. You might be able to squeeze in a game of "Name That Extraterrestrial" (See "Name that Extraterrestrial" guidelines in this section) depending on how quickly they catch on and the amount of time you have. If you have less time, be less critical. At the end of this section, you can accept titles.
2. (2 days) Allow students time to translate or study the story they have chosen. Assign shooting schedule.
3. (2-4 days) Tape stories in native language. Grade the interpretation on the written critique (See Model) to be given to the student.
4. (1-2 days) Run tape so everyone can see himself or herself. It's one of those things... You don't want to look but you have to. Hand out critiques. When all is done, inform the students that they have one day to translate the story into English and do the story in English, keeping all the nonverbal technique of the native language version.
5. (1 day) Allow them class time to prepare the English version of their story. Have dictionaries and the like available. You will probably need to remain available to answer last-minute questions.
6. (2-4 days) Tape stories in English. Grade the interpretation on the written critique (See Model) to be given to the student.

For Regular classes that have ESL students or former ESL students (Estimated length of unit: 8-13days)

1. (1-3 days) Using the suggestions from "About Nonverbal Behaviors," make students aware of different nonverbal techniques.
2. (3-5 days) Look over the material (science fiction stories) and go over a few using reader's theatre method or have them read in turn but get them to look at the concepts of the story and discuss them. This can be done with cuttings from longer stories. During this time inform the students that they will be interpreting a story and that they will need to pick one in 2 days. At the end of this section, you can accept titles on a first come –first serve basis with no repeats. For any and all students that speak another language better than English, offer them this deal. Tell them that you are grading the nonverbal part of the story and therefore the language used is not

important. Explain that students need to be exposed to other languages and cultures. Tell them you want them to be as comfortable with the assignment and offer them the chance to perform the story in their native language with the warning that if there are parts that are hard to understand or unclear, they will field questions from the audience. Regardless of the language, these students cannot do a story that is already chosen by somebody else so you will have to understand the title. Draw for order of performance.

3. (2-3 days) Allow remainder of time for students to prepare their material.
4. (3-5 days) Tape stories in English or their native language (allow extra time for questions and answers). Grade the interpretation on the written critique (See Model) to be given to the student.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Exercises to Help Students Become More Acutely Aware of Subject Matter

In the event that your students have trouble getting into the science fiction mode of thinking, it might become necessary to give them a chance to get their “feet wet” in the genre. The following exercises are short and sweet and useful due to the fact that the student has to demonstrate knowledge of the subject. It is very hard to demonstrate knowledge if you don’t understand so you are on to the ignorant very quickly and can help them faster.

As always if you see the need for alterations, please do so. Make sure it fits your style of teaching.

Sci-Fi Add-a-Line (Estimated length of unit: 1 day)

Sci-Fi Add-a-Line is an exercise that is done in a line, or each student will participate at some level of ability, one at a time. If your students are sitting in rows, up one row and down the other works pretty well and it gives the student a bit of preparation time.

You start the exercise by starting the first line. The line should have a time, place, situation and a character or characters with names that should be easy to remember (like Jerry, Sheila, etc.). The statement you make should meet a pre-assigned time limit and give out information and must not end. An example of such a statement would be:

“One day, far into the future, my future great- great- great- great- great-cousin, Joey Smellcap (distant cousin) woke up to face the morning. He stepped out of his convert-a-house that was now the way *everyone* lived because there was no way to own property; money was banned. As he tried to wake up, he pressed the convert-a-button and the small house folded in on itself until it was a small case that could fit in your hand. He placed it on the rack with the others at the corner. He had to stand in line to do this because everyone else was doing the same thing about that time. No sooner had Joey thought about what he was going to do that day (There were no jobs) than a man in a blue jumpsuit popped by him and said, “I have a rocket. Wanna fly it?”...” Thinking that this could be a good thing, Joey said, ‘Sure. Where do I sign?’ Time.” This is a 1-minute piece. It has a time (the future), a place (somewhere where people get up in the morning), a situation (a typical morning except for being offered a chance to fly a rocket) and a character (Joey, Blue Jumpsuit). It gives information and it does not end.

The next person will take that story and for the next minute, either continue it to wherever he/she wants to go with it, choose to pursue an alternate storyline in the same setting or drop that storyline and setting entirely and change everything about it and lead

the story in a new direction. You need to learn to adapt to these situations because the mind is a wonderful thing.

When your time is up, you must stop talking and the student after you must take up the story where you left off and continue it, somehow, for the same amount of time you did and when their time is up the next student will take and so on. The students should be given a number of options with which to deal with the situation.

You might not want to give anyone more time than you have to give. If you have 30 students and twenty minutes left in the class period, thirty seconds each would take fifteen minutes.

Be aware that student imaginations can take all kinds of twists and turns so try not to be too exacting. Try to instill in your charges the need to communicate tactfully and tastefully. Aside from that, beware. The mind is a wild thing when it really takes off so stay on your toes.

This exercise should enhance listening skills as the students need to carry on what the preceding speaker started which should encourage them to listen to what is being said more intently. Language skills should also be enhanced by the discussion and interpretation of things that do not exist yet. Imagination needs to be viewed to be as significant as logical thought is to the learned mind.

Name That Extraterrestrial (Estimated length of unit: 1-3 days)

“Name That Extraterrestrial” is an easy exercise that helps students better understand differences in otherworldly beings due to environment or evolution. By the time this exercise is through students will have put together an alien being and a world for it to be from.

After a short discussion about what kind of being would exist on whatever type of planet.... What kind of discussion, do you ask? I feel the discussion should center either on the beings and their special adaptation to their environment or the environment and how it caused the evolution of this race of beings. Consider some of the following sample questions to get classes thinking in terms of the unknown or far away:

- If the planet were composed entirely of a liquid substance like water, would not the being have little use for legs and more need for fin-like appendages? What might some other adaptations include?
- If the planet’s gravitational pull was very great, would not the being need to have a tough hide or, perhaps, be composed of a jelly-like substance in order to withstand it?
- If we one day choose to use *all* of our weapons of mass destruction, what do you suppose would survive and what would happen to it as a result of the radiation?

- Do you think everything out there drinks water to stay alive? Is it possible they could eat and drink things that we hate?
- I'm sure with a little thought you could come up with a lot more.

If you feel the students are doing well with this line of questioning, you can go ahead and move to the next step.

Have the students design their own extraterrestrial and while they're at it, have them create a planet for it to live on and a name for that planet. If you are afraid they won't give you enough, give them a set of characteristics you want them to talk about (height, weight, means of mobility, diet, habitat, etc.). Allow them to draw pictures to help with the explanation. Give them the remainder of the class period and another class period to work on it, as some will need some materials from home. Make copies or transparencies for them if you can so the class can see what the speaker is talking about. Make sure that your chalk/dry eraser board and overhead projector are available on presentation day to the speakers.

Have them go up one at a time and give an informal presentation on their design. By informal, I mean allow for questions and answers. You could even give a prize for the best extraterrestrial design presentation.

Once again, grading should be based solely on participation because imagination does not happen overnight. Some student may seem to lack scope and depth but that could be a student exposure issue. The main thing is that the student got up there.

Appendix B

Model: Critique for Sci-Fi Storytelling Nonverbal Communication Technique Or Sci-Fi Storytelling Critique

Name: _____ Date: _____

Story Title: _____ Time: _____

	Poor			Excellent		Comment
<u><i>Vocal Expression</i></u>						
Volume	1	2	3	4	5	
Diction	1	2	3	4	5	
Tone	1	2	3	4	5	
Pitch	1	2	3	4	5	
Intensity	1	2	3	4	5	
Rate	1	2	3	4	5	
Pause	1	2	3	4	5	
Stress	1	2	3	4	5	
<u><i>Body Technique:</i></u>						
Facial Exp.	1	2	3	4	5	
Eye Contact	1	2	3	4	5	
Gesture	1	2	3	4	5	
Movement	1	2	3	4	5	
Interpretation	1	2	3	4	5	
<u><i>“Out of Body” Technique:</i></u>						
Visual Aids	1	2	3	4	5	
Properties	1	2	3	4	5	
Costumes	1	2	3	4	5	
Comments:						

Alter as you see fit. You could also use “Yes” or “No” instead of numbers or “Poor-Fair-Good-Excellent” if you prefer. You can go from these many categories all the way down to the underlined captions or you can just give a verbal critique, if you are so moved, and use this as a personal checklist. This is just one possibility.

The criteria labeled “Interpretation” can be used in those cases when the student does not use some techniques yet does an excellent job of interpreting the tale. It can also be dropped from the categories if you so choose.

In the case of an assignment like this, I feel that an attempt on the part of the speaker should be looked upon as a minor success on the way to a major success because getting up there in front of the class is half the battle. Remember that this is one assignment where you can’t help but learn something about yourself.

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