

# Student-authored Books: Connecting English Picture

## Books with Teaching

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### Abstract

Storybooks have been widely used in the field of teaching English for young kids. For some Applied Foreign Language Majors who plan to teach English for kids, helping them understand and apply picture books on teaching becomes an important task. Thus, this study aims to equip the participants with the professional skills on teaching and investigate how they could improve their skills during picture book authoring process. An instructional design was conducted in this study, which was divided into 3 phases, from understanding stories, creating English storybooks to apply their storybooks on teaching practice. Story reading and writing are the main tasks in which the students learned to create their own picture books. All the story productions generated by the participants were presented in story elements and T-unit format to examine whether the participants fostered their sense of a story and enhanced their story writing proficiency. The findings indicate that the participants improved both sense of a story and syntactic maturity in their post-story writing. Also, they had positive attitude towards the use of picture books and the design of this study.

**Key words:** sense of story, T-unit format, create a storybook, syntactic maturity

# 繪本創作：連結英語繪本與教學

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## 摘要

故事書已廣泛應用於兒童英語教學領域。對於一些未來打算教兒童英語的應用外語科五專五年級的學生來說，幫助他們理解並運用繪本進行教學成為一項重要任務。因此，本研究旨在使參與者俱備教學的專業技能。本研究分為三個階段，從理解故事架構、創作英文故事書到應用故事於英語教學練習中。故事閱讀和寫作是本研究的主要任務。參與者創作的故事作品都以 T-單位格式呈現，用以檢查參與者是否提升了他們的故事概念並提高了他們的故事寫作能力。研究結果顯示，參與研究的學生在第二個故事寫作階段提高了故事概念和書寫故事句法的成熟度。此外，參與者對使用繪本輔助教學和本研究的設計均持正面的肯定態度。

**關鍵字：**故事概念、故事創作、T-單位格式、句子架構成熟度

## **Introduction**

This study was conducted in an elective course, “Teaching Activity Design” in Applied Foreign Languages Department. The teaching goal of this course aims to cultivate students with professional skills of teaching English for young learners. Some 5<sup>th</sup> graders who are interested in teaching English for kids would select this course. In practice, it shows that the teaching theories and strategies challenged the college students. Also, there was a gap because their present reading and writing proficiency and the ability of teaching English. An instructional aid that can strengthen their reading and writing competence and enhance their ability on planning teaching should be determined. To solve these problems, picture books were adopted in this study.

Picture books are widely used in language classrooms because of their interesting plot, simple and repeated sentence patterns. These characteristics attract readers to read and to copy sentence structures. English storybooks were applied in this study in an attempt to help the participants admire storybooks and master the use of picture books on teaching English for kids. Therefore, the study was directed to conduct an instruction with picture books and investigate the effects of such an instruction which involved the participants in creating their own picture books. During the study time, the participants would be provided with opportunities to understand the basic elements of a story, to find a theme in a story, to create a storybook as their teaching materials, and finally to design a lesson plan based on their own picture books as well.

To investigate the effectiveness of using storybooks and creating storybooks in helping the participants foster their story writing skills, increase their sense of story, prepare their teaching and understand their attitude towards this study, the following research questions should be addressed:

1. Do reading and writing story tasks help the participants enhance their sense of story?
2. Do reading and writing story tasks enhance the participants’ story writing proficiency?
3. What is the attitude of the participants toward writing and creating storybooks?

## **Literature Review**

### **Picture Books for Language Learning**

The application of English picture books in language teaching has a long history in western countries. Smallwood (1992) and Nantz & Gallmore (2001) note that storybooks contain meaning and simple vocabulary, simple sentence patterns, repetitions, interesting

story lines, beautiful illustrations and nature themes and topics that attract readers. Smallwood also believes that picture books provide comprehensible English input which can lower language learners' inhibitions. Thus, he suggests that picture books are not only for kids but also for learners with different age levels. Stewig (1985) recommends language teachers use picture books to provide language input for learners because picture books offer vocabulary and syntax models which can influence learners' language. Ghosn (1996) advocates that picture books have predictable and repetitive patterns that reinforce vocabulary and sentence structures. Most stories use the past tense to develop their story events. These stories provide a model for the correct usage of verbs in the past tense. In addition, each story contains a theme which encourages the readers to have positive attitude towards their difficulty.

The trend of using picture books in language classrooms has moved from the USA and European countries to Asian, including Taiwan. Compared to using textbooks only, the use of children's literature is suggested in the ESL/EFL classroom because storybooks contain a variety of characteristics which make learning and teaching become fun and easier. First, most of the stories are written in simple sentence pattern and interesting plot. In addition, picture books offer the advantages of illustrations to explain much of the vocabulary. Children can understand the stories easily even they do not have a large size of vocabulary. Moreover, repeated patterns in picture books provide additional aid for language learning, especially sentence patterns, correct tense and richer vocabulary words (Smallwood, 1992). Hedberg and Westby (1993) assert that many learning materials in schools are narrative materials. If we could help students familiar with narrative materials that would help them perform better at school learning. The participants would benefit from the characteristics of picture books not only for their own studies but also for the teaching training. This is the reason picture books are adopted for the participants in this study.

### **The Importance of Sense of Story in ESL Learning**

Sense of a story, also named story grammar, refers readers aware of the basic elements of a story. Generally speaking, students' knowledge of a story structure is revealed by the complexity of their story productions, either oral or written (Fitzgerald & Spiegel, 1983; Stein, 1986). Thus, from students' stories, teachers can examine the basic elements of story grammar and gain an understanding about students' sense of story. According to the following researchers, basic elements of a story indicate title, characters, time, setting, background or beginning, problem encountered, solutions, a formal ending and theme. (Phillis, 1986, Apple, 1978, Fitzgerald and Teasley, 1983). Phillips notes that dialogue between characters is also suggested.

Based on several reasons, sense of story is important for ESL or EFL learning. First,

storybooks have been widely employed as learning materials or instructional aids in language classes for students because of their attractive pictures and simplified sentence patterns, which are easier for students to understand and copy to learn. Helping ESL/EFL students to have a better sense of story can assist them to better understand story-based materials (Page & Stewart, 1985). Second, research indicates that students who have better knowledge of story structures tend to be better readers because their knowledge helps them to understand and remember stories easily (Page & Stewart, 1985; Taylor, 1992). Whaley (1981) suggests that one effective way to advance students' reading comprehension is to enhance the development of their sense of story. Since the final production in this study is to generate a storybook as teaching English material, it is necessary for the participants to create a story with completed basic elements.

### **Studies in Using Picture Books**

In recent decades, students start to learn English since elementary school in Taiwan. Many English teachers in elementary schools apply English picture books to assist teaching and improve various abilities in practices. These reports have also been shared in the field of English teaching. Some studies conducted in Elementary Schools in Taiwan affirmed the importance and necessity of using English storybooks in teaching English (陳宥琳, 民 93). The results in these studies show that students' English proficiency and motivation to learn have improved. In some studies, researchers used English picture books as teaching materials for remedial teaching of English classes in elementary schools. The findings show that English storybooks as teaching materials for remedial teaching are particularly helpful for the low-achieving oral ability students (吳季芬, 民 94; 李貞慧, 民 108). For the experimental group and the control group, the findings indicate that the improvement of students' learning attitude and the decrease of students' anxiety about English learning. In another study, the finding also shows that employing picture books enhance students' learning motivation (陳植珊, 民 100).

From the above-mentioned studies, it shows that picture books are majorly used in teaching English for kids, not much for college students. Also, there are limited researches about student-authored books, especially in the field of teaching English. Thus, this study aims at helping college students with the ability to make an English storybook and to use this storybook practicing teaching.

## Methods

### Participants

The participants of this study were 30 Applied Foreign Language majors who enrolled during 110 semester of Academic Year 2021 -2022 at a University of Technology. They were 5<sup>th</sup> graders of 5-year system when the study was conducted. They were divided into 6 groups to read, write stories and create English storybooks and plan lesson together.

### Instrumentations

The following 3 instrumentations-story writing tasks, sense of story and questionnaire were used to collect data for this study. Story writing tasks are used to analyze if the participants improve their story writing skills. In each story, basic elements of a story are examined to check if the participants foster their sense of story. Finally, questionnaire is used to gain a feedback from the participants in order to know their attitude towards the study.

### Instructional Design and Procedures

This study was conducted in the class of “Teaching Activity Design”. The teaching goal aims at cultivating the participants with the ability to teaching English for young kids. The training arranged from understanding storybooks, creating a storybook and designing a teaching plan based on their own storybooks and presenting their storybook with a lesson plan. Also, the theme of a story is emphasized in the teaching process. This study was divided into 3 phases in order to examine the participants’ story writing skills, sense of a story and the ability to plan a lesson for teaching young kids.

#### Phase 1: Baseline establishment (week 1 to week 2)

The participants were divided into 6 groups and were asked each group to work together to write a story in the first week we met. In second week, the researcher would analyze basic elements in each story and would share the result with students.

#### Phase 2: Intervention or treatment phase (week 3 to week 16)

Reading Aloud is the main practice in the class. Participants and the researcher met once a week, two class periods worth of time. Each week, the teacher demonstrated at least 2 picture books. The following strategies were used by the researcher, pre-reading, reading aloud and discussion after reading. Basic elements of a story, verb tenses and sentence structures were highlighted while reading aloud the storybooks. After reading aloud, the

researcher and the participants would discuss about what is the story “theme” in the story. (week 3 to week 10)

The participants were asked to create the second story during this phase. The researcher compared each group’s story production to their pre-story production in order to examine if the participants enhanced their sense of a story. (week 11 to week 14)

During this phase, each group members had to work together to edit their story and make their story to be a storybook. In addition, they had to make flash cards and design a lesson plan for their storybook. (week 13 to 16)

Phase 3: Application phase (week 17 to 18)

The participants had to present their storybook in class. They had to show how they demonstrated their books to teach young kids, how they used their flash cards and how their lesson plan worked.

The following books (Table 1) were selected for reading aloud while grammar, story elements and theme were discussed from September to December, 2021. For Example, the sentences from *Belinda and Ballerina*

“**Once there was** a ballerina named Belinda. Belinda **loved to** dance. She **went to** dancing school every day and **practiced** very hard.” is used to provide students with a model for the correct usage of verbs in the past tense.

Table 1: Picture Books used in This Study

Storybook	Theme	Author	Week
The Giving Tree	gratitude, appreciation	Shel Silverstein, 1964	week 3
The Stray Dog	love, kindness	Marc Simont, 2001	week 3
The Garden	friend, patient	Arnold Lobel, 1972	week 4
Swimmy	brave, wise	Leo Lionni, 1963	week 4
Peppe: The Lamplighter	family affection	Elisa Bartone, 1993	week 5
The Blind Woman	honest	Ezra L. Stieglitz, 1977	week 5
The Very Grumpy Day	emotion, feelings	Stella, J. Jones, 2016	week 5
Inch by Inch	solutions	Leo Lionni, 1960	week 6
It’s Mine	sharing	Leo Lionni, 1985	week 6
Avocado Asks What Am I	respect yourself	Momoko Abe, 2020	week 6
The Little House	environmental change	Virginia Lee Burton, 1942	week 7
Nobody Likes Me!	sharing, friendship	Raol Krischanitz, 1999	week 7
Pete the Firefighter	career education	James Dean, 2018	week 8
We All Together	multiculture	Britta Tecken Trup, 2019	week 8
Officer Buckle and	partnership	Peggy Rathmann, 1995	week 10

Gloria			
Belinda and Ballerina	never give up	Amy Young, 2002	week 10
Harry The Dirty Dog	Love, kind	Gene Zion	week 12
Grumpy Duck	emotion, feelings	Joyce Dunbar & Petr Horacek, 2018	week 12
Martha Doesn't Share	sharing	Sammantha Berger, 2010	week 12
The Cow and the Pitcher	solutions	Ezra L. Stieglitz, 1977	week 13
The Two Farmers	honest, partnership	Ezra L. Stieglitz, 1977	week 13
Doctor De Soto	wise, solutions	William Steig, 1982	week 13
Rainbow Fish to the Rescue!	Helping	Marcus Pfister, 1995	week 14
Sam, Bangs & Moonshine	lying hurts	Evaline Ness, 1966	week 14
A Pocket for Corduroy	love, value	Don Freeman, 1978	week 15
My Friend Rabbit	friendship	Eric Rohman, 2002	week 15
Tomorrow	Never Put Off until Tomorrow What You Can Do Today.	Ezra L. Stieglitz, 1977	week 16
Christmas Eve (Frog and Toad All Year)	friendship	Arnold Lobel, 1976	week 16

## Data Collection

The data were collected from the output of the participants, with their pre-writing set in September and post-writing in December. In addition to story writing, on the last week of this study, each group was asked to fill out a questionnaire on their attitude towards the use of picture books in developing their sense of story and story writing skills.

## Data Analysis

Story writing is the main task in this study. The story productions written by the participants were analyzed and compared based on the following factors: sense of a story and words per T-unit (WTU).

### 1. Sense of Story

Sense of story indicates the basic elements of a story. It is also referred to “Story Grammar”. According to Phillips (1986), basic elements of a story at least should have a title, characters,



Time	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v
Setting	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v
Background/ Beginning	x	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	x	v	x	v
Problem Encountered	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v
Solution	x	v	x	x	x	v	v	v	v	v	x	x
Ending	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v	v
Theme	x	x	x	x	x	v	v	v	v	v	x	v

The result of pre-story writing task shown on the checklist reveals that the participants know a story should clearly include its time, setting, characters, problem encountered and an ending. Yet, 3 groups (50%) forget to find a title for their stories. This may be because of a lack of narrative writing experiences. In their previous writing experiences, the college students always write something under a given topic. Two groups forgot to give their characters names. They use “he” or “she” instead of a name, which might confuse readers if there are more than two male or female characters in the story. There are 3 group developing their story from problem encountered by the main character without a background or beginning. The weakest part is solution. All of the participants know characters would experience some difficulties, but they did not provide any solution to overcome the problem, jumping directly to an ending. Moreover, in the pre-story writing productions, the participants did not have much idea about theme in their stories. When asking them, they just repeat some plot instead of an important idea showing their readers. Moreover, two stories did not have dialogues between characters. They used expository style, instead of narrative,

When the writing task comes to the 2<sup>nd</sup> one after 13 weeks, it shows there are 2- group story productions did not clearly describe how their main character solved the problem or difficulty while stories directly jumped to the ending again. Also, two groups still could not express “theme” in their stories. They just simply repeat some plot as their theme. All of them included dialogues between characters in the post-story writing productions.

In sum, in the post story-writing task, the participants achieved better performance towards their sense of a story, their stories contained more completed basic elements. After listening, reading and writing English stories for more than 13 weeks, the participants gradually learned basic elements of a story and included more in their post-writing stories. Only 2 of the 6 groups still could not express what is the main point for readers to learn or to feel in their stories.

Research Question 2: Do reading and writing story tasks enhance the participants’ story writing proficiency?

Table 3 Total Words (TW), Total T-Units (TTU) and Words per T-Unit (WTU) in Stories

Story	Pre-story writing			Post-story writing		
	TW	TTU	WTU	TW	TTU	WTU
1	121	16	7.56	205	23	8.91
2	121	17	7.11	192	16	7.38
3	167	17	9.82	197	18	10.94
4	272	27	10.07	404	35	11.54
5	285	30	9.50	185	17	10.88
6	175	20	8.75	210	23	9.13

Table 3 presents the total words (TW), total T-Units (TTU) and words per T-unit (WPU) of each story. It shows that all the 6 groups generated longer word per T-unit (WTU) in their post-story writing productions compared to their pre-story writing productions.

Applebee (1978) advocates that a “T-unit is directly related to linguistic complexity; the longer the T-units, the more complex the language is likely to be in transformational terms.” (p. 182) The finding implies that the participants performed better in the post-story writing task. In other words, after few weeks reading and writing stories, the participants improve their story writing competition along the study process.

To further examine whether the improvement reaches a significant level, t-test was used to compare the WTU mean between the pre-story writing and post-story writing productions.

Table 4 Comparison of WTU between Pre-writing and Post-writing

Story Writing Task	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	Sig.
Pre-story writing	8.80	6	.52963	.21622	4.602	.006
Post-story writing	9.80	6				

p < .005

The findings shown in Table 4 indicate that average mean in the post-story writing productions is higher than that in the pre-story writing productions, 8.80 to 9.80. The finding implies that the participants perform better syntactic maturity in their post-story writing task. The participants slightly improved their story writing competition. Yet, the improvement still does not reach a significant level. There are two possible reasons contributing to this result, which are the sample size is relatively small and the study time is

short. It might not be easy to improve syntactic maturity within one semester.

Research Question 3: What is the attitude of the participants toward writing and creating storybooks?

The questionnaire was designed to figure out the attitudes of the participants toward using picture books as instructional aids in improving their sense of story, story writing skills and teaching preparation.

Table 5 The Participants' Attitude toward Writing and Creating English storybooks

Question	Students' Answer (N = 6 Groups )				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.Do you agree that English picture books are effective learning materials for helping college students in reading and witting?	6 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
2.Do you agree to the cooperative learning? (Each group works together to write stories and create storybooks)	6 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
3.Have you enhanced your sense of story through the design of this study?	5 (83%)	0 (0%)	1 (17%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
4.Have you improved your story writing competence through the design of this study?	3 (50%)	1 (17%)	1 (33%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
5.Do you think the design of this study would help your professional skills on teaching English for young kids?	5 (87%)	1 (13%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
6.What do you learn from this study	* We read and listen to a lot of good English story books. (group 1) * We have better sense of a story. We never know there are basic elements of a story before. (group 2) * English storybooks are not as easy as we think. They are good learning materials for improving English reading and writing ability. (group 3) * We learn what is a “theme” in a story. This is a very good				

	<p>concept because we only remember an ending of a story before this study. (group 4)</p> <p>* Story writing is fun. We can improve both writing and creating skills through story writing assignments. (group 5)</p> <p>* English storybooks are very good learning materials. We can read, enjoy arts and learn sentences patterns and grammar from storybooks. (group 6)</p>
<p>7. Do you encounter any difficulty in the process of creating a storybook?</p>	<p>*It is not easy. We spent too much time on this task.</p> <p>*It is not easy to start a story.</p> <p>* It is a big challenge to design the illustrations.</p>

The results from the questionnaire shown on Table 5 indicate that all of the 6 groups agree that English storybooks are appropriate learning materials for college students. In addition to English picture books, they all accept the cooperative learning and believe it is a good approach to learn from peers. During this study, the participants worked with other peers in a group, they contributed their ability on making an English storybook. They worked together to come up some ideas for their stories, as some participants did illustrations while some edited their stories. Together, they created an English storybook. Moreover, there are 83% group members deemed that they had better sense of a story after reading and writing for few weeks. However, when asking if the participants enhanced their story writing skills, only half of them believed so.

In sum, the participants agreed that they read and loved English storybooks more because of this study. They believed they learned significantly on the basic element of a story and the concept of story theme. Yet, some of them did complain the story writing tasks are a big challenge for them. Also, story writing tasks are time consuming assignments.

## Conclusions

The design of this study aims to help the participants equip abilities in understanding the structures and theme of storybooks, creating storybooks for their own teaching and designing a lesson plan based on their own storybooks. The findings reveal that the college students enhanced their sense of story and performed better syntactic maturity in their post-story writing productions. In other words, they generated more completed basic elements stories and had better sense of story in their post-story writing. When comparing

their WPT which serves as a measure of language maturity, it shows WPT in post-writing productions is higher than it is in pre-story writing. This implies the participants improved their story writing skills but it did not reach a significant difference. The participants may need more time to foster their story writing proficiency.

The participants provided positive feedback on the use of storybook, the improvement of their sense of story and have better knowledge on creating a picture book and designing a lesson plan. Yet, only half of them believed the improvement of their story writing competence. Few of them still thought Student-authored book is a challenge and time-consuming task.

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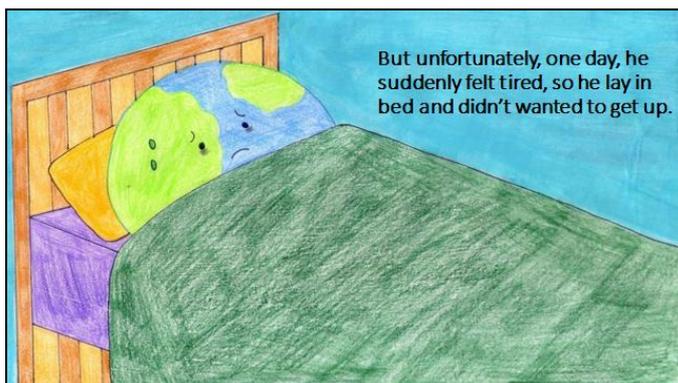
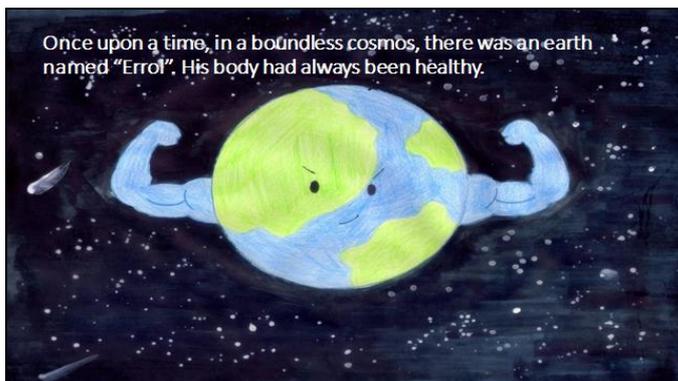
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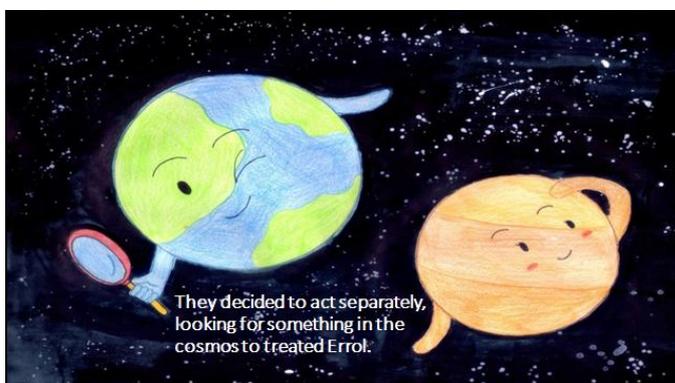
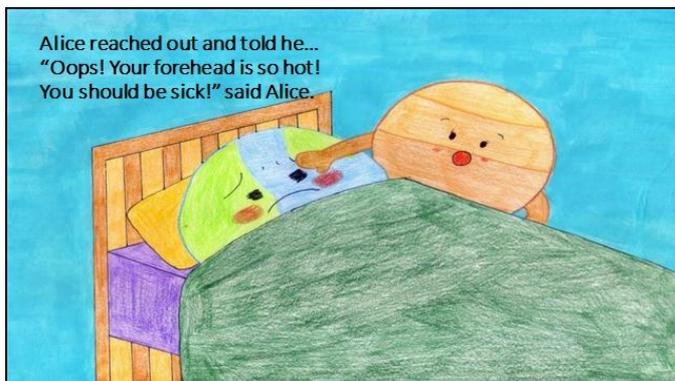
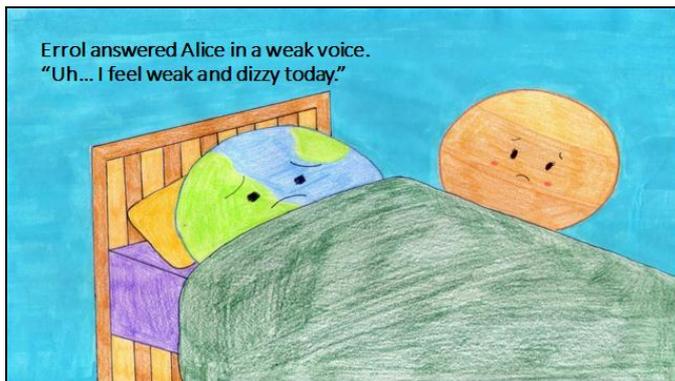
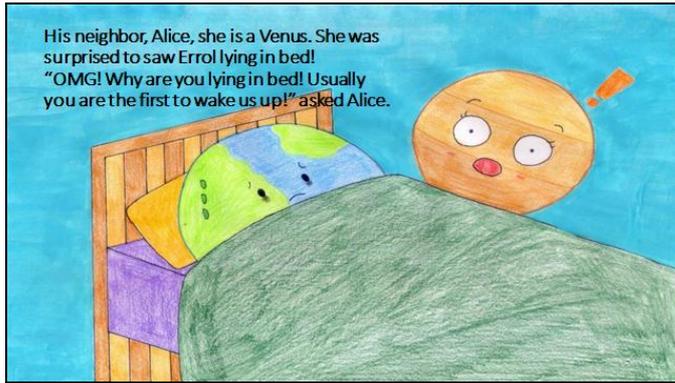
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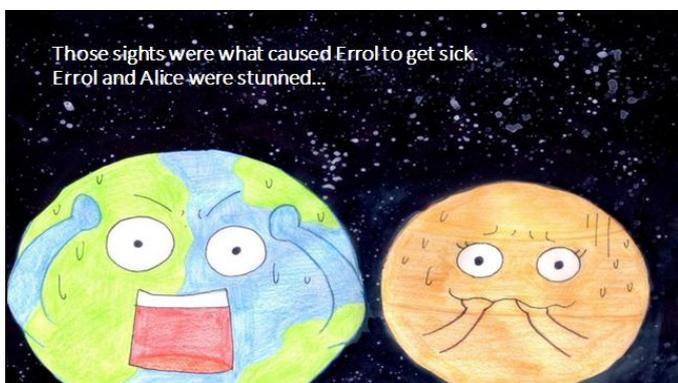
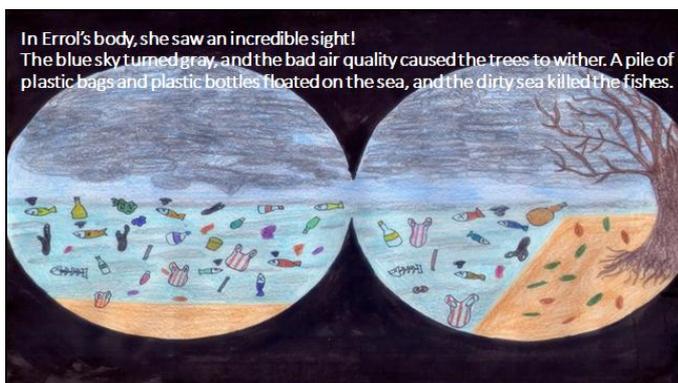
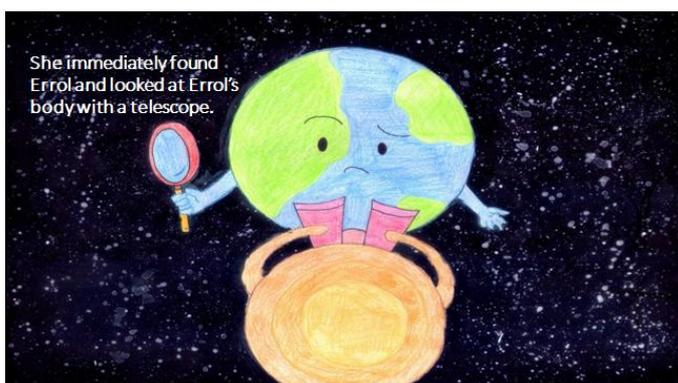
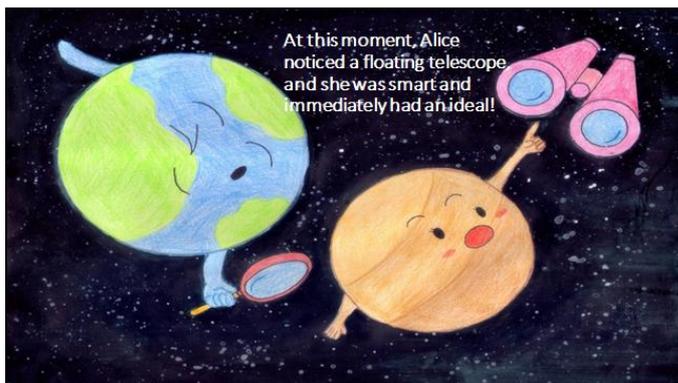
## Appendix

### Part I. Storybook Production (Group )

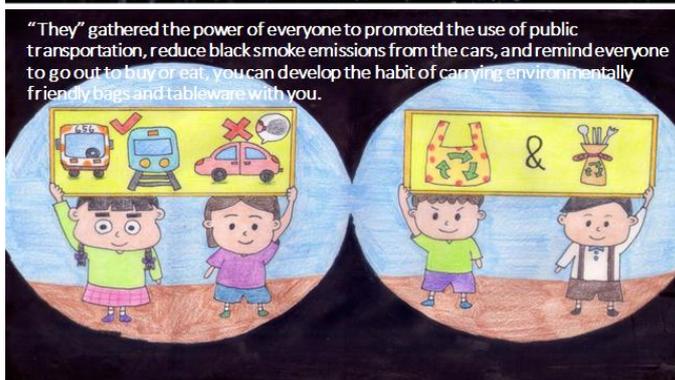
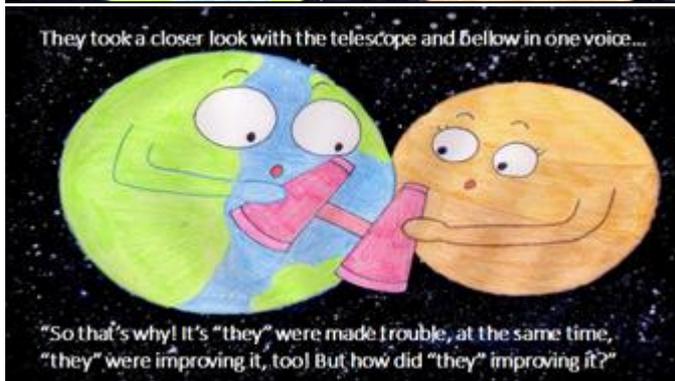
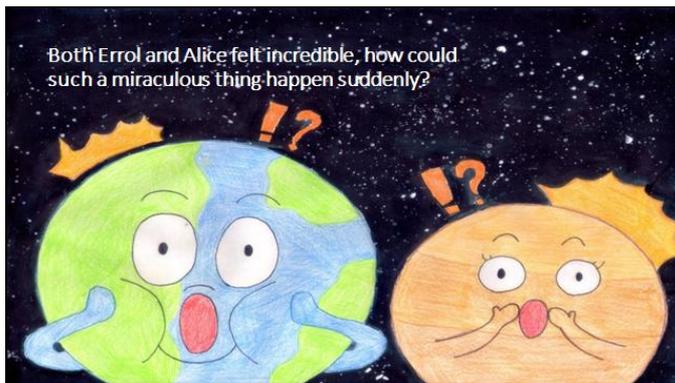
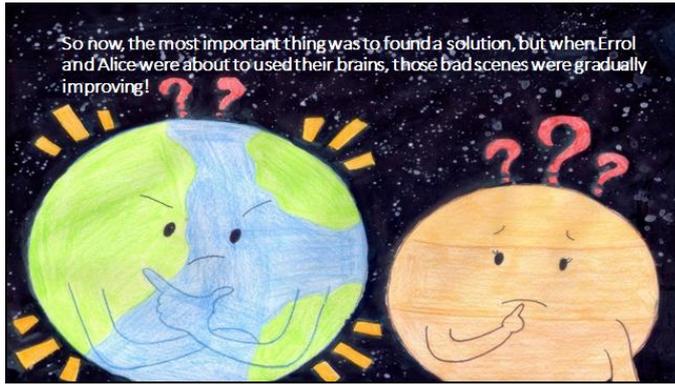


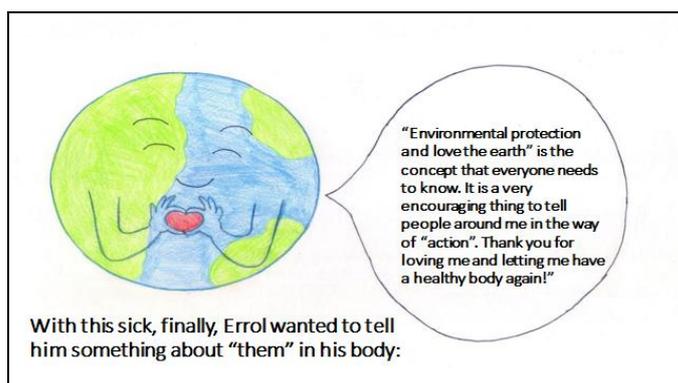
Student-authored Books: Connecting English Picture Books with Teaching



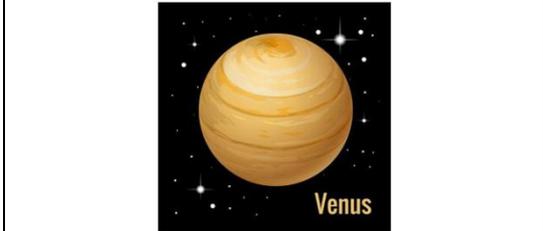


Student-authored Books: Connecting English Picture Books with Teaching





### Part II Flash Cards

Vocabulary	Picture
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>cosmos</b></p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Venus</b></p>	

<h1>telescope</h1>	
<h1>public transportation</h1>	

### Part. III Lesson Plan

Lesson Plan			
Elementary School		Grade: 3	Storybook: Love Earth Errol
New Vocabulary		1. cosmos    3. Venus 2. telescope    4. Public transportation	
Teaching Aids		Flash card, sandbag, magnet, baton, PPT	
Time:  5 min	Warm-up	1. Ask the children what they know about environmental protection? 2. Ask the children if they have noticed that family or friends around them are doing something about the environment. 3. Ask children from life what can we do to protect the earth?	
15 min	Presentation	Use the projector to play the stories in the PPT, and read the stories in the PPT to the children, and use the baton to point out the words, pictures and key points.	Teaching PPT, Teaching Baton
10 min	Practice	Use the flash cards to lead the children to read the above words once, spell them out, and show pictures related to the words.	Flash cards, Teaching baton
		In groups of two, two cards will be	

10 min	Activities	randomly posted on the blackboard, and the teacher will read out the words related to one of the cards. Please cooperate with the students and use the sandbag to throw out the correct word or picture. The one hits the right answer gets one point.	Flash cards, sandbags, magnet
5 min	Wrap-up	Award time. The top 3 groups can get a stationery gift pack.	Prizes for the winner
Teachers		All members in group 4	