Marta Popławska

An American short story course: an attempt at integrating content and language learning

> "Reading is a kind of travel, an imaginative voyage undertaken while sitting still. Reading is immersion; reading is reflection." (Schwarz, 2008: 3)

1. Introduction

Teaching literature in a foreign language at university level brings multiple challenges connected with the level of students' general knowledge, expertise in literary theory or literary analysis as well as their language skills. Having the above-mentioned ideas in mind, the author of the study attempted to research into and employ alternative approaches and methods in order to diversify literature classes and adapt them to the needs of today's students, also the struggling ones. Literature classes seem to provide almost perfect CLIL setting, where literary theory and literary analysis can be naturally combined with language analysis and learning. Thus, the following paper describes American Short Story classes that were conducted from CLIL perspective and seeks to inquire into the issue of integrating literature reading with writing skills. Numerous advantages suggest that content and language learning might be beneficial for students giving them an opportunity to develop their knowledge of and sensitivity to cultural as well as linguistic issues, additionally enhancing their independence and confidence in the learning process.

2. Foreign literature classes – traditional vs. current approaches

Literature classes at university level come in various shapes and sizes. Although most of them share the objective of using authentic texts as primary sources, there are multiple approaches and techniques employed in the course of teaching/learning literature. The choice depends among others on teachers' preferences, students' attitudes and levels of motivation or simply their knowledge and experience. When discussing the issue of teaching literature in a foreign language, one is faced with one more dilemma connected with students' language competence. The general level of proficiency in a foreign language as well as of various components including reading competence should be considered as crucial factors determining the teacher's choice of

teaching methods to be implemented in classroom context. As the epigraph to this article states reading literature is "a kind of travel" in which the reader is able to discover the world around him/her but it is also "immersion". Although what D. R. Schwarz most probably meant was immersion into someone else's thoughts and visions, one cannot deny the fact that it is primarily immersion in the language the writer chooses to use. Therefore, literature classes can become an opportunity to develop students' knowledge of and sensitivity to cultural as well as linguistic issues.

Traditionally, foreign literature classes at university or other institutions of tertiary level have aimed at gaining content knowledge rather than developing students' ability to focus on the language of a given work of art. In her overview of various university programmes for English studies in Poland, Aleksandrowicz-Pędich (2003) notices that for many years since World War II literature was considered a subject of major importance and was taught from historical and critical perspective only. As a result, as the author claims "programy literatury przeładowane były literaturą dawną, a podawana i następnie egzekwowana wiedza często miała charakter encyklopedyczny. Chronologiczna prezentacja literatury, zwłaszcza angielskiej, powodowała konflikt pomiędzy złożonością językową i tematyczną literatury dawnej, uczonej na niższych latach studiów a możliwościami językowymi studentów" ["literature syllabi were overloaded with old literature and the knowledge given and tested was often of an encyclopaedic character. The chronological presentation of literature, especially English literature, caused a conflict between the linguistic and thematic complexity of old literature taught to first- or second-year students and language capabilities of the students"]. (Aleksandrowicz-Pędich, 2003: 43) A similar argument can be found in Reichl's work entitled *Cognitive Principles, Critical Practice: Reading Literature at University*, in which the author points out that "theoretically, a CLIL-setting would imply a focus on both content and language teaching. Practically, hardly any language teaching seems to happen in literature classes" (Reichl, 2009: 191). She also argues that "students are expected by their teachers to bring along sufficient reading skills and strategies to be able to understand the more complex notions of sometimes difficult, language-sensitive texts," which "stands in stark contrast to the description of beginning BA students at level B2" (Reichl, 2009: 192). As a consequence, traditional approaches seem to miss certain opportunities which have been made available due to the development of CLIL perspective.

3. Literature courses in a CLIL-oriented classroom:
   the benefits of the approach

As many scholars notice, language cannot be studied only as a lexico-syntactical system separated completely from culture and knowledge or, in other words, content that is inherent in its use (Aleksandrowicz-Pędich, 2003: 35; Bernhardt, 2011: 84, Chodkiewicz, 2011: 13). Taking this one step further, one could argue that teaching the elements of culture cannot be detached from teaching language use. Thus, the CLIL approach, which can be defined as "planned integration of contextualised content, cognition, communication and culture into teaching and learning practice" (Coyle, Hood and Marsh, 2010: 7), seems to emerge as a useful tool for comprehensive and effective teaching of foreign language learners. This becomes even more significant when we take into consideration the growing number of students who have major problems with grammar, whose language skills appear insufficiently developed, who "lack the way to explore the intricacies and interests of the words on the page" (Scholes, 2002: 165). Furthermore, as Reichl (2009) points out, "it is decisive whether students see their classes as contributing to a whole or as separate units of learning with an inherent and implicit aim only" (p. 150). Thus, an additional benefit of adopting a CLIL approach in the classroom is connected with its holistic attitude, which promotes perceiving the language learning process as complete and intercorrelated across all the language-based subjects.

Another advantage offered by CLIL is that it ensures an effective implementation of a shift from teaching to learning, or in other words focusing on student-centred learning. In her discussion of different problems connected with learning and teaching literature at university, Reichl (2009) emphasises that "this shift implies a change in the understanding of the roles of student and teacher in a university context: while the learner is suddenly the focus of interest and a great deal more responsible for his/her learning processes, the teacher turns into someone who provides opportunities for learning, s/he turns into a learning facilitator, a learning coach and a learning mediator" (p. 161). Literature classes become more interactive and student-led, the researcher argues, and we can avoid engaging students in a traditionally used "guessing game" where students try to guess the answer to the teacher's questions, yet when they are unable to do it "the teacher finally solves the puzzle for them" (Reichl, 2009: 153). With a CLIL approach, we reverse the traditional priorities and course objectives, focusing our attention on the process of understanding rather than the very product itself. Thus, when designing CLIL materials the teacher should "include a lot of pair work, group work and cooperative learning techniques" and the tasks given should "require students to talk, compare and

contrast, discuss and draw conclusions – initially orally and then in written formats" (Coyle, Hood and Marsh, 2010: 88).

In discussing the need for a "thinking curriculum for CLIL", the authors of *CLIL: Content and Language Integrated Learning* underscore that it should aim to connect thinking processes to knowledge construction and thus involve lower-order thinking (remembering, understanding, applying) and higher-order thinking (analysing, evaluating and creating) (Coyle, Hood and Marsh, 2010: 30). This seems to be a perfect starting point for teaching and learning critical thinking as well as critical reading skills. These skills, indispensable for educated graduates, were described by Wallace (2003) in the following way:

> the ability to critique the logic of texts, to note inconsistencies and lack of clarity, (…) [aiming] to help people see logical anomalies in texts and in arguments of all kinds, and to encourage independence of thought, (…) to critique not just micro features of specific texts but attend to wider implications which relate to the circulation of dominant discourses within texts and so ultimately to the power bases of society (p. 27).

Hence, as Fang and Schleppegrell (2011) notice, "engaging all students as readers and writers across subject areas is also a matter of social justice" (p. 9). Equipped with critical reading skills students gain independence in judgement as well as an opportunity of "effective participation in a democratic society" (Fang and Schleppegrell, 2011: p. 9). In different types of guidebooks on critical thinking for students one can clearly notice that the skills meant cover finding arguments and recognising their importance, persuading and arguing, explaining and summarising, identifying reasons and drawing conclusions, reading between the lines and behind surfaces, and finally presenting a point of view in a clear and logically structured way (see e.g. Brink-Budgen, 2000; Cottrell, 2011). In order to support the development of students' critical skills the classes should follow a well-known pattern of progression – from superficial and simple to complex issues, from discussing images to analysing concepts, from receptive to creative skills, from verbal to written analysis.

Last but not least, the consequence of following a CLIL approach in the literature classroom is the motivational factor. Students are more willing to study literary texts when they see that the tasks they perform are manageable, effective and efficient, and that the skills and competences they acquire can be transferred to other fields of study, and, what is more, that the new input can be linked with their previously acquired knowledge. Using the elements of a CLIL approach creates numerous opportunities for both general English teachers and literature instructors to work on the enhancement of both advanced literacy skills and foreign language competence by either using literature during language classes in EFL settings or adding language focus to English language literature classes (Reichl, 2009: 196).

4. The study

4.1 The purpose of the study

The following action research study aimed at examining the usefulness of integrating content-based learning and language learning in English language literature classes held at the undergraduate level in Neophilology Department. The course discussed in this chapter was a one-semester course of American Short Story and was designed to broaden the students' knowledge of American literature as well as to develop their reading and writing skills.

As part of the curriculum, the students had already completed among others a two-semester course in Introduction to Literary Theory, three-semester courses in British Literature, as well as Reading and Writing in Practical English. All of the above-mentioned classes appear to be essential in the course of studying general English but they also serve as an indispensable introduction to the course in American Short Story.

Generally speaking, it becomes clear that the students should have already acquired quite broad background knowledge and some experience in reading different literary texts, including short stories. Yet, it should also be noted that reading literature in a foreign language is especially demanding and in spite of the fact that the students seemed willing and interested, the tasks they were presented with aimed at giving them additional support through this complex process.

The purposes of the present study were:

1. to help the students understand selected literary texts written in English by enhancing their reading and writing skills;
2. to acquaint the students with and assist them in practising various techniques of close reading and writing;
3. to involve the students in classroom activities based on text analysis, comparison or argumentation that require peer interaction as well as independent and critical thinking;
4. to build the students' awareness of the necessity of integrating content and language learning, as well as to give them an opportunity to observe how effective such an instructional approach can be.

4.2 Participants

The group consisted of 12 participants, 9 female and 3 male second-year undergraduate students of English in the Department of Neophilology in Pope John Paul II State School of Higher Education in Biała Podlaska. The students

majored in teaching English as a Foreign Language and their minor was the culture and literature of English-speaking countries. Their level of English proficiency seemed to be satisfactory, and could be described as that of B2/C1 as specified by the Common European Framework.

4.3 Materials

Texts. During the course in question the students worked primarily with original versions of short stories written by American authors, all of them considered to be the classics of the genre. The texts were selected with the aim of familiarizing students with the history of American short story as well as providing them with an opportunity to practice English language skills. Short stories, as the name suggests, are usually short narratives which "will normally concentrate on a single event with one or two characters, more economically than novel's sustained exploration of social background" (Baldick, 1996:204). Thus, being of moderate length and complexity, they seem a perfect choice for conducting this kind of action research study which attempts to enquire into the issue of integrating literature reading and the practice of writing skills.

Worksheets. Apart from the texts of stories, the teacher prepared worksheets (see Appendix 1) with close-reading activities whose role was clarifying and simplifying the process of text reception. They included reconstructing story events, analysing the setting of the story, comparing and contrasting characters/ situations/ scenes, drawing conclusions on the basis of presented evidence, etc. Most of the tasks aimed at drawing the students' attention to the language used by the writers and showing them how to discover ideas behind individual words and sentences. During the later stages of the lessons, the tasks centred around various written assignments like collecting and arranging arguments/ examples/ quotations, which eventually led to writing full essay outlines and essays.

Questionnaires. The author of the study designed two questionnaires for the purpose of the study (see Appendix 2 and 3). The goal of the pre-study questionnaire, which consisted of 7 close-end questions, was to collect some important data about the participants, find out what their reading preferences were, as well as elicit their opinions concerning the difficulties they found in reading in English, and the usefulness of selected reading techniques. The students were also asked to evaluate their competence as readers of English as a foreign language, and to determine their level of motivation to study American literature. The post-study questionnaire, on the other hand, gave the students an opportunity to evaluate the course in question. The questionnaire included two

closed-ended questions focusing on the students' evaluation of the usefulness of given techniques implemented in the classroom as well as asking about their opinions on the course and one open-ended question asking the students to comment on the course discussing its positive sides, its drawbacks as well as suggesting further changes.

Both questionnaires used predominantly closed-ended questions asking the participants to mark their answers on a scale or to choose one or more of the given options.

4.4 Design and procedure

The present action research study was conducted during one-semester course in American Short Story. The students met once a week for a 90-minute class. The first meeting was devoted to the general discussion of reading issues, with the teacher-researcher trying to learn about the students' reading preferences as well as to draw their attention to the very process of reading and the challenges connected with reading in a foreign language. Additionally, during the first meeting the teacher posed a number of questions to review the students' knowledge of reading strategies, short story structure and American culture in general. All the remaining sessions were proper classes dealing with the analysis of selected American short stories combined with the practice of reading and writing skills.

Most of the classes of the present study followed the same pattern starting with activating or extending background knowledge and finishing with a writing project. First of all, the students were asked to do the preliminary reading of the stories at home, which gave each student a chance to go through the text at their own pace without the pressure or other inconveniences connected with classroom reading. Next, each lesson included a small-scale internet-based research project assigned individually or in pairs, which required the students to retrieve and compile information in the form of a short presentation of the writer and his/her achievements, literary style or themes discussed. The main part of each lesson centred around activities which checked and/or assisted comprehension of a given text, with students asked to reconstruct story events, to complete charts comparing and contrasting characters, elements of the setting or particular scenes. Most of those tasks required the students to reread a given short story, to find appropriate passages, to select scenes and examples, to analyse and synthesise information, and most importantly to draw conclusions.

The pattern of the classes also included a shift from reading activities to written assignments. However, before the students were asked to write an essay, they worked on activities revising their knowledge of a given essay structure and style, possible methods of organization or commonly used transitional words. Taking into consideration the time-consuming nature of written tasks, the teacher assigned writing essays as homework but supervised the process of writing essay outlines during the classes. After the essays had been evaluated by the teacher, the students whose compositions did not fulfil the established essential requirements were obliged to correct or rewrite the first versions of their essays. Although this part of the student work was done at home, it served as a very important teaching tool, allowing the students to analyse their own writing mistakes and giving them practice in written analyses.

Lastly, the research study concluded with the post-study questionnaire, its purpose being, as already mentioned, the course assessment.

Table 1 below presents the structure of the four lessons designed especially for this action research study including the types of classroom activities implemented, as well as a list of objectives aimed at by the teacher-researcher providing the students with appropriately balanced content and language practice.

Pre-study questionnaire	
Class 1 – Washington Irving "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow"	
Tasks and activities	**Objectives**
-reconstructing story events -analysing the setting of the story; contrasting the realistic and supernatural elements -comparing/contrasting the characters -revising the structure of comparison and contrast essay, revising transitional words showing comparison and contrast -arranging arguments, writing an outline Homework: writing a short essay of comparison and contrast based on literary analysis	Students practise: -reconstructing story events and identifying short story structure elements (exposition, climax, resolution) -finding appropriate passages of the story describing the setting and the characters -using appropriate quotations/descriptions/ information as arguments for a comparison/contrast essay -essay writing

Class 2 – Edgar Allan Poe "Ligeia"	
Tasks and activities	**Objectives**
-reconstructing story events -analysing the setting of the story -comparing/contrasting the characters -analysing vocabulary which the author uses to create the atmosphere of the Gothic – completing a table, dividing into categories -analysing the definition of Gothic fiction and identifying the elements of the Gothic employed in the short story -revising the structure of an argumentative essay, revising transitional words introducing arguments -arranging arguments, writing an outline Homework: writing a short argumentative essay based on literary analysis	Students practise: -reconstructing story events and identifying short story structure elements (exposition, climax, resolution) -finding appropriate passages of the story describing the setting and the characters -using appropriate quotations/descriptions/ information as arguments for an essay -essay writing
Class 3 – Charlotte Perkins Gilman "The Yellow Wall-Paper"	
Tasks and activities	**Objectives**
-reconstructing story events -analysing the setting of the story -analysing the characters, narration type -identifying and analysing passages in which the narrator describes the wallpaper -identifying major themes and motifs of the story – drawing conclusions -revising the structure and vocabulary of a process description essay -writing an outline Homework: writing a short process description essay based on literary analysis	Students practise: -reconstructing story events and identifying short story structure elements (exposition, climax, resolution) -finding appropriate passages of the story describing the setting and the characters -using appropriate quotations/descriptions/ information as elements of the process description essay -essay writing
Class 4 – John Cheever "The Swimmer"	
Tasks and activities	**Objectives**
-summarising the story briefly -analysing realistic aspects of the story – establishing the conventional plot line and setting -analysing fantastic properties of the story -detailed analysis of realistic and surrealistic descriptions, focus on descriptive vocabulary – places, weather and season changes -tracing the pattern of revelation in the story -identifying major themes and motifs of the story – drawing conclusions -arranging arguments, writing an outline Homework: writing a short argumentative essay based on literary analysis	Students practise: -summarising the story -finding appropriate passages of the story describing the setting and the characters -using appropriate quotations/descriptions/ information as arguments for an essay -essay writing
Post-study questionnaire	

Table 1. The design of the study

4.5 Results and discussion

The results of the research study in question will be discussed with reference to the pre- and post-study questionnaires as well as the teacher's observations of the effectiveness of the approach chosen and the classroom tasks implemented.

4.5.1 The results of the pre-study questionnaire

The first findings of the pre-study questionnaire concerned the students' general reading experience and preferences (the first two questions). When asked how often they read, the students answered that they did it sometimes (7 students), often (4) and very often (1). When asked to specify the type of texts they read, the equal number of the respondents chose novels and internet websites (9 responses), which should not be surprising as students are obliged to read novels on a regular basis as part of their curriculum and the Internet appears to be a natural source of knowledge for young people nowadays. Other choices included: short stories (5), magazines (4), newspapers (3), comic books (2), and poetry (1).

Question 3 concerned the students' evaluation of their competence in reading in English as foreign language. The majority of them perceived their competence as intermediate with only one student marking elementary and one advanced competence. The answers seem to confirm the fact that the students' reading skills and foreign language skills are still not fully developed and require additional attention from the teacher, justifying at the same time the choice of CLIL methods for literature classes.

When asked what, in their opinion, makes reading a literary text in English difficult (Question 4), the students did not give uniform answers. Nine out of 12 students pointed to sophisticated vocabulary as posing serious problems; for 7 students too complex sentences seemed to be quite or even very difficult; 4 students chose lack of interest in the topic and low motivation as serious obstacles to effective reading of foreign literary texts. Text structure/genre as well as lack of background knowledge about the author and historical/cultural context did not seem to be as challenging for the respondents (chosen as very difficult by 1 student and 2 students respectively).

Question 5 asked the students to reflect on the usefulness of different techniques employed during literature classes. The biggest number of respondents appreciated watching a film version of a literary text (12 students) and group discussions (11). Other popular choices included the teacher's lecture (9 students), reconstructing story events (8), comparing/contrasting characters

and themes (8), working in pairs/small groups (7), comparing/contrasting two novels or short stories (7). The least popular techniques turned out to be writing reflective diaries (3 answers) and writing essays (2). These results seem to confirm the author's hypothesis that today's students rely greatly on audio-visual technology in the process of learning. On the other hand, they also seem to appreciate more traditional classroom techniques like group discussions or the teacher's lecture, while at the same time they are not willing to get involved in any kind of writing tasks.

Additionally, in the last question of the pre-study questionnaire 8 of 12 students participating in the study agreed that reading the literature of a particular country was important when learning the language of that country and decided that American literature classes should also include activities focusing on language practice. Furthermore, all of the students wanted to know more about the literature of the United States of America. However, those answers appear to stand in contrast to the ones given in the last question of the pre-study questionnaire. When asked about the level of their motivation and eagerness to do a course in American Literature, 5 students defined it as average, two as low while only five as high or very high.

4.5.2 The results of the post-study questionnaire

The most important point in both questionnaires concerned the usefulness of various techniques employed in the process of analysing a fictional work of art in English in the classroom (Question one of the post-study questionnaire). Generally speaking, it can be observed that after completing the course in American Short Story the students changed their opinions concerning the techniques focused upon, noticing their usefulness and helpfulness. Before the course 8 students thought that comparing and contrasting characters or themes could be useful (or very useful) whereas after the course their number grew to 12, which means all the students taking part in the study expressed such a view. Reconstructing story events was graded as useful by 8 students in the pre-study questionnaire and by 11 students in the post-study questionnaire, and 7 students appreciated working in pairs and small groups before as compared to 10 students after the course. The biggest increase can be noticed as far as writing essays is concerned, with only 2 students marking it as useful in the pre-study questionnaire and as many as 8 students in the post-study questionnaire. It appears then that the students appreciated writing tasks despite their challenging and time-consuming character. The numbers did not change for group discussions (11 students thought them to be helpful before and after the course) and comparing/contrasting two short

stories (7 students thought it to be helpful before and after the course) . What seems quite surprising is that there were 2 students who changed their mind after the course and decided that watching a film version of a literary text was not very useful; on the whole, all the students marked it as useful or very useful before and 10 students after the study. This finding might suggest that there were students who appreciated working with a written text for literary analysis rather than relying on visual aids.

When assessing the course in the post-study questionnaire (Question 2), all of the students agreed that it had broadened their knowledge about American literature and culture, 10 respondents confirmed that the classes had helped them in the process of reading and understanding short stories as well as helped them focus on important elements/parts of the short story and draw conclusions. As many as 9 students said that the course had showed them some new strategies and techniques of analysing a literary text, and finally, 8 students felt inspired to read more short stories or other literary texts.

The third question was open-ended and it asked the students to comment briefly on the usefulness of the techniques introduced during the classes as well as changes that could be introduced in the future to a course of a similar kind. Generally, the students enjoyed the classes and appreciated the use of worksheets distributed by the teacher. One person remarked that writing essays was a challenging task but it helped the students understand the texts better. Most students did not have any suggestions for changing the lesson organization or methods used. Only two respondents wanted to watch film adaptations more often, and one person suggested devoting more time to one piece of literary work of art. On the whole, these results seem satisfying and prove that the project was effective as the students appear to have appreciated adopting basic principles and techniques of a CLIL approach in a literature-based course.

4.5.3 Analysis of the students' written essays

One of the research tools used in the present action research study which provided important data were essays assigned as homework after each of the presented classes. This task was introduced with the aim of developing students' writing skills, enhancing their independence and critical thinking skills as well as revising and systematising the knowledge acquired during the classes.

As far as language issues are concerned, one of the most common problems that the students had was the correct use of grammatical tenses to describe characters and events. The students found it difficult to adopt one point of view, i.e. present or past, and be consistent with the tenses they used. Additionally,

maintaining a proper level of language formality proved to be quite challenging for some students who overused informal words or phrases, e.g. "The narrator *goes nuts*", "Ligeia finally rises from the dead which is extremely *creepy* and Gothic-like" or presented poor style, e.g. "The narrator is still obsessed with his deceased wife while his second wife, Rowena, lies in bed, dying. As Rowena dies, the narrator sits in the chair near her bed and smokes opium, *does it show his real feelings?! That is how he loves her?!*" (italics added by the author).

Another issue which proved to be challenging was preparing outlines and adhering to the planned structure of the essay. Although every time a new essay type was introduced the students revised its structure, many of them still found it difficult to plan the essay properly and make its structure clear and coherent. Furthermore, it appears that more attention should be given to the use of quotations in essays. Most students did not have any problems with finding appropriate quotations to support their arguments but some of them clearly lacked knowledge or practice how to incorporate chosen quotations into their essays, how to introduce and comment on them properly.

All these problems seem to confirm the need for a stronger focus on language matters and the need to introduce new and varied methods into the process of teaching/learning literature. Moreover, writing essays based on literary analysis proves to be a helpful teaching tool, giving students additional language practice as well as an opportunity to develop critical thinking skills including the ability to express one's point of view in a clear and logical way.

6. Conclusions

Following a constant need to update the discussion on improving instruction in philological and language departments at undergraduate level this paper has sought to analyse the usefulness and effectiveness of integrating content and language learning in the literature classroom. When designing the American Short Story course in question, the teacher focused on teaching the elements of literary theory and history as well as enhancing reading comprehension by integrating reading and writing tasks. The first reason for implementing the above-mentioned approach into the teaching-learning process was an attempt to face and react to the problems affecting today's students, who have been brought up in the visual age, who often complain that reading literature is difficult or boring, and who are in need of developing solid language competence. By introducing a shift from general to detailed comprehension, from individual images to whole concepts, from literal to more abstract analysis the teacher aimed to make the reading process easier and more attainable. By introducing a

shift from activities completed in pairs or groups to individual tasks the teacher aimed at building students' self-confidence and motivation to progress. Finally, by introducing a shift from receptive to productive skills, from reading to writing the teacher intended to show the students how they can further develop as conscious readers, to encourage critical thinking and to make them see the process of writing as "a way of coming to a better, more critical and informed understanding of a literary text" (Reichl, 2009: 294). All in all, as suggested by Schwarz, precision of thought, clarity of expression, logic of argument are invaluable and indispensable skills for every educated person, especially the graduates of humanities (Schwarz, 2008: 82).

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Appendix 1: Class 1 – "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" by Washington Irving

Task 1. The Plot
Work in small groups. Reconstruct the story events in bullet points.

➤

➤

➤

➤

➤

Task 2. The setting

Work in pairs. Find appropriate passages in the story and analyse its setting. Complete the table.

REALISTIC DESCRIPTIONS	SUPERNATURAL ELEMENTS

Conclusions::

_____

_____

Task 3. The characters
Work in pairs. Find appropriate passages in the story and analyse its characters. Complete the table.

	Personal information	External appearance	Personality/ behaviour	Other
Ichabod Crane				

Brom Van Brunt				
Katrina Van Tassel				

Conclusions: _____

_____

_____

_____

Comparison and contrast essays

A comparison and contrast essay discusses only similarities, only differences or both comparison and contrast is used. The essay may be arranged in one of the following patterns. It is acceptable to use either of them, but you cannot mix them in one paper.

Study the two patterns below carefully, noting the differences in structure that each presents.

➤ **Pattern A: Subject-by-Subject Method.** Present all the information about X, and then present parallel information about Y. This pattern tends to work better for shorter papers, and those with few subtopics.

First: All of X:
point 1 (plus support)
point 2 (plus support)
point 3 (plus support)

Second: All of Y:
point 1 (plus support)
point 2 (plus support)
point 3 (plus support)

The danger built into Pattern A is that the writer can end up with two separate essays instead of one unified comparison and contrast essay. To ensure unity, take note of the following guidelines:

- Each subtopic in Part I must also be discussed in Part II.
- Subtopics should be discussed in the same order in both parts.
- Subtopics in Part II should generally include reminders of the point made about the same subtopic in Part I.

➤ **Pattern B: The Point-by-Point Method.** Present one point about X, and then go to the parallel point about Y. Move to the next point, and do the same thing. This pattern tends to work better for long papers and those with many subtopics.

First X: point 1 (plus support)
Then Y: point 1 (plus support)
Then X: point 2 (plus support)
Then Y: point 2 (plus support)
Then X: point 3 (plus support)
Then Y: point 3 (plus support)

➤ **Guidelines for a Successful Comparison-Contrast Essay:**
- Use specific and relevant examples for support.
- Give equal treatment to both elements that you are discussing
- Use transitional words or phrases to help the reader understand the similarities and differences in your subject.
- Conclude your paper by restating your thesis, summarizing the main points, and give the reader the final 'so what' of the major similarities and/or differences that you discussed.

(Based on Skwire and Swire 2008: 155-184)

Task 4.
Complete the table with appropriate transitional words.

meanwhile	same as	similarly	likewise	although
on the contrary	at the same time	in addition	unlike	just as
in contrast	conversely	compared to	at the same time	on the other hand
even though	as well as	correspondingly	however	but

Phrases That Show Comparison (Similarities)	Phrases That Show Contrast (Differences)

Task 5.
Using the chart from TASK 3 write down major differences in the presentation of the story's two male characters and arrange them in one of the patterns (subject-by-subject or point-by-point).

Task 6.
Write an essay of comparison and/or contrast discussing the following topic:
'The Legend of Sleepy Hollow' is a humorous and supernatural – or rather, mock-supernatural – story which can be seen as being about the opposition of two American types, and which in its crisis is a kind of symbol of the fate of New England Puritanism.

Remember about a proper introduction and conclusion for your essay!

Appendix 2: Pre-study questionnaire

1. How often do you read? Tick (√) the chosen option.
[ ] very often   [ ] often   [ ] sometimes   [ ] rarely   [ ] never

2. What kind of texts do you usually read? Tick the chosen option (√).
[ ] novels   [ ] short stories   [ ] poetry   [ ] comic books
[ ] magazines   [ ] newspapers   [ ] internet sites   [ ] other ………………………

3. How do you see your competence as an English language reader (elementary, intermediate, advanced)?

4. What, in your opinion, makes reading literary texts (especially novels and short stories) in English difficult?   Mark the answers given using the scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = most difficult and 5= least difficult.

lack of background knowledge about the author, historical and cultural context	1	2	3	4	5
text structure, genre	1	2	3	4	5
sophisticated vocabulary	1	2	3	4	5
too complex sentences	1	2	3	4	5
lack of interest in the topic, low motivation	1	2	3	4	5

5. In your opinion, to what extent are the following techniques useful when reading/analysing a fictional work of art (in English) in the classroom? Circle the options that you choose.
1 – not useful   2 – hardly useful   3 – useful   4 – very useful

a. teacher's lecture	1	2	3	4
b. comparing and contrasting characters/ themes	1	2	3	4
c. reconstructing story events	1	2	3	4
d. working in pairs or small groups	1	2	3	4
e. group discussions/debates	1	2	3	4
f. acting out scenes	1	2	3	4

g. comparing and contrasting two novels/short stories	1	2	3	4
h. watching a film version of a literary text	1	2	3	4
i. writing essays	1	2	3	4
j. writing reflective diaries	1	2	3	4
k. doing projects	1	2	3	4

6. To what extent do you agree with the following sentences? Circle the options that you choose.

A – I totally agree

B – I agree

C – I disagree

D – I totally disagree

E – I don't have any opinion

a. Reading the literature of a country is important when learning the language of that country.	A	B	C	D	E
b. American literature classes should also include activities focusing on language practice.	A	B	C	D	E
c. I would like to know more about the literature of the Unites States of America.	A	B	C	D	E

7. What is your level of motivation and eagerness to do a course in American Literature as part of the curriculum? Tick the relevant option (√).

[ ] very high   [ ] high   [ ] average   [ ] low   [ ] none, I just have to study it

Appendix 3: Post-study questionnaire

1. To what extent were the following techniques used during the course helpful when reading/ analysing a fictional work of art (in English)? Circle the options that you choose.

1 – not useful   2 – hardly useful   3 – useful   4 – very useful

a. comparing and contrasting characters/ themes	1	2	3	4
b. reconstructing story events	1	2	3	4
c. rereading the text/ finding appropriate passages to support arguments	1	2	3	4
c. working in pairs or small groups	1	2	3	4
d. group discussions/debates	1	2	3	4
e. comparing and contrasting two novels/short stories	1	2	3	4
f. watching a film version of a literary text	1	2	3	4
g. writing essays/ essay outlines	1	2	3	4

2. Read the following statements and decide whether you agree or not.
American short story classes:

broadened my knowledge about American literature and culture	I agree	I disagree
inspired interest in reading short stories or other literary texts in general	I agree	I disagree
helped me in the process of reading and understanding of short stories	I agree	I disagree
helped me focus on important elements/parts of the short story and draw conclusions	I agree	I disagree
showed me some new ways/strategies/techniques of analysing a literary text	I agree	I disagree

3. Comment briefly on the usefulness of techniques introduced during the classes. Would you change or add anything to make the classes more interesting and effective?

(liczba znaków ze spacjami: 44 535)