

Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" in the English as a Foreign Language Classroom

Suborno Barua

International Islamic University, Chittagong, Bangladesh

subornobarua@gmail.com

Abstract

There is a symbiotic relationship between language and literature. Language is the medium of literature, and literature exposes learners to language, thereby cultivating critical insight and language competency. As literature serves this dual purpose, this article therefore attempts to use "The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson as teaching material for an EFL Classroom. To achieve that, the qualitative research method has been used to develop the text as an English language teaching material. The content analysis method has been applied to study the text. Necessary linguistic materials that address the four language learning skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking, have been explored to provide comprehensive teaching material. To improve reading and writing skills, comprehensive questions, phrase identification, filling in blanks, breaking down long sentences, changing sentences, and writing activities such as dialogue, essays, and summaries have been developed. To develop listening and speaking skills, role-play sessions, discussions, pronunciation practices, and vocabulary development processes have been implemented. Overall, the study has shown that "The Lottery" can provide learners with literary and linguistic benefits if used properly. Further studies may explore the contributions of this literary text to learn English as a foreign language.

Keywords: *Short story, EFL classroom, language skills, literature, teaching material*

*Corresponding Author © The Author 2025

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Introduction

Literature has the capacity to address the needs of language acquisition. Cultural barriers that naturally occur with a foreign language hinder language acquisition. Littlewood (2000) believed "Literature can overcome this problem because, in literary works, language creates its own context" (p. 179). Literature removes the barrier by providing learners with access to authentic situations that benefit language learners. Additionally, the four basic skills required to learn a language can be focused on intimately through literature. "The use of literature as a technique for teaching both basic language skills (i.e. reading, writing, listening, and speaking) and language areas (i.e. vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation) is very popular within the field of foreign language learning and teaching nowadays" (Pourkalhor & Kohan, 2013, p. 52). That literature can be a valuable tool for language acquisition is a settled dispute; it has led to the wide acceptance of using literary texts, which have demanded newer texts to be exploited in the language classroom as teaching-learning

materials. Roy and Mahmud (2014) observed that a lack of learning materials created difficulties for both teachers and students. Therefore, this paper proposes a literary text as a teaching material comfortable to use in the EFL classroom.

When it comes to the selection of literary texts, it creates a new debate about whether poetry, essay, novel, drama, or short story is more effective than other genres. Moreover, for foreign learners, language acquisition through content that requires deep attention can disrupt comfort and lead to monotony. Arkan (2005) states that “students find the contents of a novel, poetry, and drama more difficult to follow due to the requirements of reading between the lines that these literary genres seek. That is different for the short story. He further argues that students identify short story reading as simpler and less complex than reading other literature courses.” (p. 33). It also motivates students to continue reading so that they can solve the problem, and since it is interesting, they will not get frustrated either (Erkaya, 2005). Moreover, it assists classroom facilitators in teaching the four levels of language proficiency (Küçüköğlu & Sariçoban, 2011).

Therefore, this paper selected “*The Lottery*,” a short story written by Shirley Jackson in 2008, as teaching-learning material in an EFL classroom. The selection was made for various reasons. Firstly, the story creates a suspense that keeps readers to the very conclusion. This will not make the text monotonous. Secondly, the texts discuss common aspects of society, including the market, town, school, bank, post office, and, most commonly, the lottery. This creates a connection to the reader's personal life, making the text more relatable. Thirdly, there are no large paragraphs or any unnecessary narration that extends the attention span on a particular paragraph. The story moves on smoothly. Finally, the selection is quite flexible to use, whether at a stretch, in a single classroom, or in a segment.

Literature Review

For teaching English as a language, literature can be quite useful. Literature possesses linguistic capabilities, including simple sentence structures and a vocabulary that fosters language competency, along with engaging stories that reflect human ambition, fantasy, adventure, and emotions. This offers students the motivation needed to learn the four language skills (Kadel, 2021; Pathan, 2013). In EFL contexts, students are highly influenced by their L1 language, and learning a L2 language becomes quite difficult. Therefore, content and language integrated learning can improve classroom outcomes because literature serves as a motivator for stimulating learners' curiosity, interest, and perception of the language and its culture (Baby, 2022; Erkaya, 2005; Lasagabaster, 2010; Namaziandost et al., 2022; Nazara, 2019).

Advantages of Short Stories in the ELT Classroom

The goal of teaching English is to make the learners feel connected and comfortable with the language. To achieve this, short stories can be incorporated as study materials in EFL classrooms. According to Arkan's research findings, students find the contents of the novel, poetry, and drama courses more difficult to follow because these types require ways of reading that are different from those required for the short story. The results of his study also show that students identify short story reading as simpler and less complex than reading other types of literature courses. (Arkan, 2005). English for foreign language learners can be challenging if taught using literary genres that are lengthy and time-consuming. Kapar and Bhandari (2020) highlighted that short stories are shorter than novels, which helps teachers to easily teach their sessions. As they are shorter than a novel, short stories are effective sources of teaching in classroom situations. Another point that makes short stories efficient tools for ELT classes is that they maintain high interest and attention.

In an EFL classroom, short stories enable instructors to teach the four main language skills to students of all language proficiency levels (Küçükoğlu & Sariçoban, 2011). Short stories provide a framework for integrating four language skills. They offer new ideas, words, phrases, proverbs, discourse markers, social narratives, dialogues, and conversations that facilitate the facilitator in utilizing the reading material to improve language skills. It improves reading skills (Heidarian & Heydon, 2025; Maisarah et al., 2023) because reading stories exposes learners to new words and phrases, allowing them to understand the meaning of these words and effectively learn vocabulary usage, rather than through isolated vocabulary lists (Irhamni et al., 2025). In the classroom, it enhances grammar, pronunciation, as well as fundamental language skills, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Ali Mansoor et al., 2022). Moreover, the use of short stories enhances critical thinking, in addition to fundamental language skills (Heidarian & Hedon, 2025).

Literary and Pedagogical Value of “The Lottery”

Cohen (2011) states that, alongside Ambrose Bierce’s “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” and Flannery O’Connor’s “A Good Man’s Hard to Find,” Jackson’s “The Lottery” is one of three short stories that are most anthologized in American twentieth-century literary history (p. 44). Jackson has written more than one hundred short stories and six novels. Her noteworthy works for Children are “The Bad Children” and “Nine Magic Wishes”. “The Lottery” is still taught today because it is an instructive launching pad for discussing American and individual social values; multiculturalism appears capable of tempering strong moral responses to the story. (Michelson, 2006, p. iv).

Fujs (2023) highlights that “The Lottery” assists in developing interpersonal skills, intercultural, social, and civic competences, as well as socio-cultural knowledge, which are valuable skills in the EFL context. Moreover, the shocking ending and the sharp criticism of tradition and culture encourage students to think critically and prompt discussion and debates in class, which help learners develop their communicative skills. The text also employs symbolism and lexical items that invite modern readers to misinterpret the author’s intended meaning, thus making the text critical for teaching (Jose, 2025). Therefore, students learn to interrogate texts rigorously, not for their content, but for the ways language has been constructed in the portrayal of social realities, which encourages interpretive rigor and ethical awareness (Wellek & Warren, 1956), making the classroom more engaging and productive.

Although the short story “The Lottery” brought Shirley Jackson to the attention of American readers after it was published in *The New Yorker* in 1948, scholarly studies have largely ignored the potential of the text as a reading material for English language teaching pedagogy. In fact, her short story genre has long been neglected—indeed, almost stigmatized—within literary criticism (Carlstein, 2024). Particularly, this story has not been studied before for teaching purposes. Therefore, the current study aims to establish the analogy that “The Lottery” should be included in the study materials of students learning English as a foreign language.

Method

This research is a qualitative study of the text, which has been thoroughly analyzed using content analysis methods. The main text, “The Lottery,” written by Shirley Jackson, has been used as the primary source for this study, and relevant research papers, journals, and scholarly articles have been reviewed as secondary sources. The study was conducted following preparation, organizing, and reporting methods suggested by Elo and Kyngas (2008).

At the beginning, a holistic reading of the text was taken to achieve contextual and conceptual immersion. Then, parts of the text that addressed EFL-specific strategies were explored with the help of intensive reading and the examination of secondary sources. The exploration of the text yielded different analyses, encompassing narrative segments that featured thematic motifs, lexical elements, and dialogic exchanges. Meanwhile, secondary sources were selectively reviewed to contextualize the author's oeuvre within broader literary and sociocultural discourses. This provided the foundational understanding of developing activities from the text.

The text was then used to develop EFL pedagogical tools. It addressed all four language skills. To improve reading and writing skills, comprehensive questions, phrase identification, filling in blanks, breaking down long sentences, sentence restructuring, and writing activities such as dialogue, essays, and summaries have been developed separately. For building listening and speaking skills, role-play sessions, discussions, pronunciation practices, and vocabulary development processes have been developed, respectively.

The last phase culminated in the synthesis of all the findings as a cohesive pedagogical framework with credible references from studies. The findings present the text as a versatile EFL pedagogical material that enhances receptive skills (reading), productive skills (writing), and interactive skills (speaking and listening).

Results and Discussion

Reading Skill

Reading the text enables EFL readers to understand the context of the story. Reading sharpens recognition and comprehension skills. Rahman (2019) states that, "a good reader can get the meaning of a text by identifying keywords and guessing the meaning of new words." (p. 87). Additionally, comprehension questions can also aid in reading. Readers can be asked to answer the following questions set from the selection. To assess students' reading skills, this activity can be useful.

- a. When does the lottery take place?
- b. Where do the people gather for the lottery?
- c. Who usually assembles first for the draw?
- d. Who had time and energy to devote to civic activities?
- e. What business did Mr. Summers run?
- f. What was the profession of Mr. Graves?
- g. What was the thing that the villagers didn't like to change?
- h. What was the age of the oldest man alive in the village?
- i. What did Mr. Summers use instead of wood clips for the drawer?
- j. Who won the lottery at the end?

Next, guessing the meaning from the text or knowing the meanings of the words from the text contributes to understanding the story and enriches readers' vocabulary. The students can be asked to select the correct meanings of the given words.

- 1) lottery
 - a) a random drawing for a prize
 - b) a type of financial investment

- c) a planned sequence of events
- 2) hush
 - a) silence or stillness
 - b) loud noise
 - c) excitement
- 3) assemble
 - a) to scatter
 - b) to bring together
 - c) to destroy
- 4) boisterous
 - a) noisy
 - b) gentle
 - c) calm
- 5) reprimands
 - a) praises
 - b) scoldings
 - c) suggestions
- 6) menfolk
 - a) young boys
 - b) male members of a group or community
 - c) old men
- 7) jovial
 - a) gloomy
 - b) cheerful
 - c) angry
- 8) paraphernalia
 - a) essential tools or equipment
 - b) unnecessary and excessive decorations
 - c) items related to a specific activity or event
- 9) precede
 - a) to follow after
 - b) to come before
 - c) to ignore
- 10) shabby
 - a) elegant and polished

- b) worn-out and in poor condition
 - c) bright and shining
- 11) chant
- a) a type of dance performed at celebrations
 - b) a repetitive song or phrase, often for
 - c) a ritual, a style of painting with vibrant colors
- 12) perfunctory
- a) showing deep interest and enthusiasm
 - b) done with minimal effort or care
 - c) requiring a lot of thought and planning
- 13) overlarge
- a) extremely small
 - b) excessively large
 - c) average size
- 14) petulant
- a) cheerful and happy
 - b) easily irritated or annoyed
 - c) calm and composed

Another strategy could be the identification of the phrases. The learners can identify the following phrases as noun phrases, adjective phrases, and prepositional phrases, etc. Identification makes it easier for the teacher to assess the condition of the readers' reading skills.

- a. the flowers were blossoming
- b. in the morning
- c. of liberty
- d. to gather
- e. faded house dresses
- f. boisterous play
- g. the black wooden box
- h. the oldest man
- i. a great deal
- j. on a shelf
- k. heads of households
- l. a ritual salute
- m. the official of the lottery
- n. good-humoredly

Students can be asked to fill in the blanks by choosing appropriate words from the table. Students may need to add -s to a plural word or to a third person singular of a verb in the present tense, -ed to the past tense of regular verbs, -ing for the present participle, etc.

has	go	conduct	had	blossom
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- a. The lottery _____ by Mr. Summers who had time and energy for civic activities.
- b. The official of the lottery _____ had to use it in addressing each person who came up to draw from the box.
- c. There _____ always been a lottery, he added petulantly.
- d. Bill Hutchinson _____ over to his wife.
- e. The flowers _____ profusely and the grass was richly green.

Writing Skill

A good mastery of English writing skills plays an important role in effective communication (Rahman, 2019). Writing skills are equally beneficial in acquiring reading and speaking skills. However, such mastery cannot be easily achieved because writing is the most challenging of the integral skills for teaching English in an EFL context (Ananda et al., 2014). Rahman (2019) suggests that “breaking up long sentences into short ones is a good way to make the readers understand the expressions because long sentences become a problem when they contain difficult concepts, and when there are several of them in sequence” (p. 89). Complex sentences make text incomprehensible. Students can be asked to break down complex and compound sentences and make them simpler.

- a. The morning of June 27th was clear and sunny, with the fresh warmth of a full-summer day; the flowers were blossoming profusely and the grass was richly green.
- b. The girls stood aside, talking among themselves, looking over their shoulders as they rolled in the dust or clung to the hands of their older brothers or sisters.
- c. Soon the men began to gather, surveying their own children, speaking of planting and rain, tractors and taxes.
- d. The women, wearing faded house dresses and sweaters, came shortly after their menfolk.
- e. He was a round-faced, jovial man who ran the coal business. People were sorry for him because he had no children, and his wife was often scolded.
- f. The original paraphernalia for the lottery had been lost long ago, and the black box now resting on the stool had been put into use even before Old Man Warner, the oldest man in the town, was born.
- g. Every year, after the lottery, Mr. Summers began talking again about a new box, but every year the subject was allowed to fade off without anything being done.
- h. There had also been a ritual salute, which the lottery official had to use in addressing each person who came up to draw from the box. However, this had changed over time, and now it was felt necessary only for the official to speak to each person approaching.

- i. Just as Mr. Summers finally left off talking and turned to the assembled villagers, Mrs. Hutchinson came hurriedly along the path to the square, her sweater thrown over her shoulders, and slid into place in the back of the crowd.

Students can be assigned to change the following sentences as directed, because practicing sentence transformation implicitly integrates with broader language learning. It enhances writing features, sentence-making abilities, and internalizes learners with the syntactic patterns and grammatical structures of the target language (Rao, 2008, as cited in Kadel, 2021).

- a. The lottery took not more than two hours to complete. (Positive)
- b. Mr. Summers and Mr. Graves put the slips of paper in the box. (Interrogative)
- c. Holding her hands desperately as the villagers moved in on her, Tessie Hutchinson was in the center of the crowd. (Compound)
- d. Mrs. Hutchinson craned her neck to see through the crowd and found her husband and her children standing near the front. (Complex)
- e. No one liked to upset the tradition represented by the box. (Affirmative)
- f. The people of the village began to gather in the square. (Negative)

The learners can be instructed to write simple, complex, and compound sentences based on the text. Initially, the students will identify sentences from the text and write down a number of sentences that have similar sentence structures. This will help students develop their writing skills as they will be exposed to a variety of sentence structures, grammatical structures, and vocabulary from the text (Kadel, 2021; Maisarah et al., 2023). It will also improve their ability to identify different sentence structures correctly.

Writing activities are crucial for their emphasis on promoting creativity and imagination in students. It provides ideas and linguistic elements for creative writing (Heidarian & Heydon, 2025; Maisarah et al., 2023).

1. Students can write a review of the story.
2. Students can summarize the story in a few sentences or a few words.
3. Students can paraphrase any two paragraphs of the text.
4. Students can write the themes of the text.
5. Students can write an essay regarding the context of the text.
6. Students can write a short fiction similar to the text.

Activities 1 and 2 can be assigned to middle-intermediate level students, activities 3 and 4 are suitable for intermediate level students, and advanced level students can be instructed to work on activities 5 and 6.

Listening and Speaking Skills

Short stories provide learners with opportunities to improve their interactive skills. Reading the text in the classroom can arouse students' interest in the text, which will eventually lead to interaction between the teacher and the students. Pardede (2011) asserts that, "Short stories can also be a powerful and motivating source for teaching both speaking and listening. Oral reading, dramatization, improvisation, role-playing, reenactment, and discussion are some effective learning activities that center on a short story. EFL classes can be used for enhancing these two skills." (p. 22). Speaking and listening skills are something

that are based on interaction. However, teacher-student interaction is compulsory to be competent in these two skills while learning a foreign language.

Story-telling is an effective tool for developing language skills in both L1 and L2 languages and is considered more effective than traditional materials for language teaching. It enhances communicative competence and facilitates effective language acquisition (Lucarevski, 2016). It is also an effective instrument to boost learners’ motivation and increase their active participation in language acquisition (Wajnryb, 2003; Wright, 1995). In this activity, students can share stories they have heard from their families or have learned about legends from their culture. In the EFL classroom, teachers can start with this activity to create a more interactive and inclusive classroom environment.

For advanced-level students, teachers can lead a discussion on the story and the author. Discussion is one of the effective teaching methods for teaching learning and speaking skills (Maulana et al., 2020). In the classroom, the students can express their opinions on contemporary issues that symbolize the main theme of the story. Moreover, criticisms can also be made of the text to reveal what changes and modifications are needed. Criticisms require analysis and thorough study of the literary text, which enhances a student’s creative skills and communicative competence (Khatib & Mehrgan, 2012).

Second language learners mostly mispronounce British and American words due to a lack of knowledge and practice. “So, the students should have a balanced idea about the sound systems of both the first language and the foreign language. In fact, knowledge of the sound systems of the mother tongue or the first language is a crucial factor that determines one’s ability to pronounce foreign language words correctly,” contends Rahman (2019, p. 92). The following pronunciations are frequently mispronounced. Pronunciation practice of these words can improve their speaking skills. Groupwork can be effective in this case, where individuals can correct themselves and learn together. Teachers should be careful and attentive in this activity because Hoque (2010, p. 215) reveals that “the sound of consonant clusters is also problematic for Bengali speakers. They put a short vowel within or before the consonant cluster.”

Table 1
Words and their IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) transcriptions

Words	British pronunciation (in IPA)	American pronunciation (in IPA)
sunny	/ˈsʌni/	/ˈsʌn.i/
gather	/ˈgæðə(r)/	/ˈgæð.ə/
began	/bɪˈgæn	/bɪˈgæən/
flowers	/ˈflaʊə(r)/	/ˈflaʊ.ə/
profuse	/prəˈfjuːs/	/prəˈfjuːs/
square	/skweə(r)/	/skwer/
lottery	/ˈlɒtəri/	/ˈlɑː.t̬ə.i/
morning	/ˈmɔːnɪŋ/	/ˈmɔːr.nɪŋ/
through	/θruː/	/θruː/
assemble	/əˈseɪmbl/	/əˈsem.bəl/
boisterous	/ˈbɔɪstərəs/	/ˈbɔɪ.stə.əs/

stuffed	/stʌft/	/stʌft/
liberty	/ˈlɪbəti/	/ˈlɪb.ə.ti/
over	/ˈəʊvə(r)/	/ˈoʊ.və/
summer	/ˈsʌmə(r)/	/ˈsʌm.ə/
reprimands	/ˈreprɪmə.nd/	/ˈrep.rə.mænd/
example	/ɪɡˈzɑːmpl/	/ɪɡˈzæm.pəl/
follow	/ˈfɒləʊ/	/ˈfɑː.lou/
clung	/klʌŋ/	/klʌŋ/
taxes	/tæks/	/tæks/
corner	/ˈkɔːnə(r)/	/ˈkɔːr.nə/
fade	/feɪd/	/feɪd/
precede	/priˈsiːd/	/priːˈsiːd/
husband	/ˈhʌzbənd/	/ˈhʌz.bənd/
menfolk	/ˈmenfəʊk/	/ˈmen.fouk/
town	/taʊn/	/taʊn/
jovial	/ˈdʒəʊviəl/	/ˈdʒoʊ.vi.əl/
reluctant	/rɪˈlʌktənt/	/rɪˈlʌk.tənt/
grasp	/ɡrɑːsp/	/ɡræsp/

Source: The IPA transcriptions have been retrieved from the online edition of the Cambridge Dictionary (2021)

Students fail in reading and writing tasks because of having an inadequate or underdeveloped vocabulary. The text will expose learners to new words within a rich context. Learners can learn to use these words appropriately and effectively. Learning vocabulary will increase their ability to use different synonyms and antonyms. It is also important for language learning because vocabulary is seen as the kernel for all language skills, without which language acquisition cannot be achieved (Ali Mansoor et al., 2022). This improves students' writing skills as well.

Table 2

Words collected from the text to enrich the learners' vocabulary pool

paraphernalia	splintered	grinned	menfolk
boisterous	perfunctory	hush	overlarge
reprimand	stack	petulant	daintily
reluctant	interminable	breathless	warmth
profuse	soberly	defiant	shabby

Role-play Session

Role-play is “pretending to be someone else, especially as part of learning a new skill” (McIntosh, 2015, p. 1336). The students can play roles from the text and act to enhance

their speaking and listening skills. This will also help them concentrate on accent, pronunciation, expressions, intonation, stress, and speaker-listener rapport, similar to that of native speakers.

Conclusion

A literary text is the symbiosis of language and literature that makes it an effective instrument for English language pedagogy. For L2 learners, literary texts can help them break the cultural barrier in language acquisition and improve their language skills. For EFL classroom facilitators, literary teaching materials help them enhance student motivation, foster classroom interaction, and promote learner-centered teaching. However, facilitators and learners face difficulties due to the insufficient availability of literary materials that address the multidisciplinary aspects of the English language. This study, therefore, is an attempt to address the scarcity of teaching materials required for English language acquisition. The renowned short story “*The Lottery*,” penned by Shirley Jackson, has been selected for use as teaching material in an EFL classroom in this study. Prior studies on this short story focused mostly on its literary contributions. Scholars have long ignored the potential of this literary text in language pedagogy, which addresses four basic skills of language acquisition. Therefore, the present study contributes to filling this research gap and provides activities such as comprehension questions, guessing meaning from the text, identifying phrases, and filling blanks with appropriate words, which address learners' reading skills. Breaking down long sentences, changing sentences, writing sentences in different sentence structures, and other writing activities that develop their writing skills. Moreover, storytelling, debates and discussions, pronunciation practices, role-play sessions, and vocabulary development exercises address the listening and speaking skills of the learner, helping them build communicative abilities. Overall, the short story proves to be a competent teaching material in an EFL classroom, with future studies examining the impact of this material on the four language skills.

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The Author

Suborno Barua is a student at International Islamic University, Chittagong, Bangladesh.