Let’s Think in English Lesson 1: The Bridge

Reasoning pattern: frames of reference

Overview
This activity uses a short narrative to explore the characters’ moral responsibility for events, establishes the concept of a fable, then asks the students to consider the importance of characters’ motives and what else is needed to develop the story into a short story which is read for pleasure. The students are therefore asked to consider why we read fiction and to work out what is needed to transform one type of narrative into another. The lesson begins to establish that, when writing fiction, the writer takes every decision in order to interest and provide enjoyment for the reader.

Key words
fable, entertainment/enjoyment, motive, characterisation, setting.

Materials
The Bridge narrative, on paper or screen
Who was to blame? sheets – one per student
Powerpoint

Lesson plan

Concrete preparation

Introduce the story on screen and/or paper. Ask students to clarify what is different about a civil war from others; perhaps ask if anyone knows who the American Civil War was between and what it was about.

Read the story with the students. Check understanding of storyline and that there are five characters. Explain that $100 was a lot of money in those days, perhaps $1000 nowadays. Hand out Who was to blame? sheets.

Social construction 1 (individually, then in groups)

Students consider individually who was most to blame for the woman’s death, putting the characters in rank order without looking at anyone else’s. They then discuss their rankings with their group, trying to agree a group ranking by giving their reasons and trying to persuade others to agree with them. They write down the agreed list under Group List. (If a group really can’t agree, allow them to bracket two people together as equally responsible to break the deadlock. If a group starts voting without discussing, explain that this isn’t enough – they will have to explain their reasons to the class.)
Take feedback from the groups, drawing out why students believe as they do and the fact that people can have different opinions. Students to explain their reasons as far as possible. Most students are likely to feel that the woman is most responsible for her own death because she ‘cheated’ on her husband, but students with other ideas should be encouraged to express them. Students will usually come up with negative reasons for the other characters, e.g. the boatman was very greedy, the lover was selfish, the soldier was stupid or cruel, but some may have more positive ideas which should be encouraged.

**Cognitive conflict (individually, then in groups)**

Explain that the story is a **fable** – a story to make people think about why they behave as they do.

A difficulty with a fable is that it doesn’t say why the people behaved as they did, their **motive**. As an example, ask for good or at least acceptable reasons why the woman took a lover. Answers may include (draw out any not suggested by students):

- she was lonely
- she was vulnerable; it was wartime and she was alone
- her husband hadn’t left her enough money to live on
- her relationship with her husband was unhappy; perhaps he has a lover
- her husband treated her badly; perhaps he was abusive
- she wanted someone to love her because her husband didn’t

Point out that it’s easy to think of a bad reason (motive) for why the people behaved as they did, but there may be other reasons that are ‘good’ or at least acceptable.

Ask the students to discuss in their groups and **see if they can think of a ‘good’ or acceptable motive for the lover, the boatman and the soldier**. They write it next to the character on the sheet under Good Reason. Take feedback after a few minutes. Answers may include:

- the soldier is usually excused because he was following orders – he may be frightened of being punished. This is reasonable because disobeying an order in wartime is a serious offence that led in those days to flogging or execution. Some students may say it was unnecessary to shoot an unarmed woman, but others may point out that women were sometimes used as messengers or spies in wartime (a high level response).

- boatman: students may come up with a ‘good’ reason such as he has a large family to feed, or it’s very risky to take someone across the river when it’s forbidden to cross the bridge and he wants danger-money (if you would be shot for crossing the bridge, wouldn’t you be shot for crossing the river?); or the building of the bridge has ruined his business and he’s desperate for work.
• the lover: students may explain his refusal to give the woman $100 as showing he has fallen in love with her and wants to stop her returning to her husband; or he needs the money for something more important; or he knows it’s dangerous to try to cross the river in a boat (if you’re not allowed to cross the bridge, you’re probably not allowed to cross the river and could be shot) and wants to save her life (a high level response).

The husband’s reason for going away may be raised – this could be important because it affects his wife’s behaviour. Reasons may include going away to earn money for his family; going away on business or to fight in the war; going to stay with his lover, perhaps a former girlfriend; going off to have a good time with friends; going to get away from his wife because their relationship is bad.

Students should explain their answers as far as possible.

Social construction 2 (individually, then in groups)

Recap that a fable is a story to make us think about why people behave. But most stories aren’t like this – and they’re not so short. We usually read stories of 5, 10, 20, 50 pages or whole novels. Ask students: why do we read stories (fiction)? Take answers straightaway. Students will often come up with enjoyment but pursue this – why do we enjoy reading fiction? Students will gradually come up with deeper reasons such as imagining we are there in the story, enabling us to visit other times and places in our imagination, escaping for ordinary life, imagining what we would do if we were in that situation, learning about people or other times / places, learning new words, etc. Pursue this if necessary till there are a range of answers.

Ask students to suppose they had to rewrite The Bridge as an enjoyable story. What would they need to add to the story to make it enjoyable for the reader? Quick brainstorm in groups, jotting down any ideas on the Who was to blame? sheets. Take feedback. Students often come up with:

• what the characters look like; how they dress; how they behave
• description of where they live, of the bridge
• good descriptive language
• dialogue
• suspense
• a good beginning and end

In discussion, encourage the students to consider why an enjoyable story has these features.

If no-one mentions it, point out that the characters would need names. Why would we need to give the characters names?
Metacognition (reflection) (groups)

Ask the students to consider in groups [if short of time, divide the class in half and ask one half to consider each question]

- If you were going to rewrite the story for readers to enjoy, would it matter if you thought the woman behaved badly or she had a good reason? Why?

- If you were going to rewrite the story for readers to enjoy, would you write it in the 3rd person (“he said”) or 1st person (“I said”)? If 1st person, which character would you have tell the story? *(Not the woman because she is dead.)*

Take feedback after a few minutes. Students should be aware that how we feel about the woman influences how we tell the story in various ways – how we describe her and her behaviour, how we describe others’ reactions to her, how we want our readers to feel about her.

The second should begin to introduce the idea that 1st person makes the readers feel more involved in the story but limits how the story is told.

Bridging

The activity has prepared students for:

Let’s Think lesson 2 : The Bridge - openings
The Bridge: who is to blame?

Who is most to blame for the woman’s death? Who is second most to blame? And so on. **By yourself**, write them next to the numbers under My list. 1 = most to blame, 5 = least to blame.

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<th>MY LIST</th>
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