

NOAH and the GOLDEN TURTLE

Stories from the East and
West for the ESL Student

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**For Robert, Eliza, Katie,
Christie, and Bobby**

Preface

Noah and the Golden Turtle: Stories from the East and West for the ESL Student is designed for high-intermediate ESL students. The theoretical rationale for the reading text is based upon Schumann's acculturation model for second-language acquisition and Smith and Goodman's psycholinguistic model for reading.

According to John Schumann's model, cultural differences can play a major role in limiting the total second-language ability of a learner. He addresses these limitations from the point of view of the function of language, dividing it into three components: communicative, integrative, and expressive.

Through the communicative function information is exchanged among persons. The integrative function serves to mark one's identity within society and the expressive function is designed to allow the expression of certain psychological needs. (1974, p. 140)

Initially, second-language learners use language only in its communicative function. The second language at this stage is characterized by its simplification and reduction. When students' needs develop beyond simple communication to integration into the society of the second language, their language skills must improve to allow acculturation to take place. For many students this is not an easy point to reach, for it requires, to a certain extent, a rejection of their own language. Richard Rodriguez, in *A Memoir of A Bilingual Child*, expresses this experience of rejection. "For my part, I felt that by learning English I had somehow committed a sin of betrayal." (1981, p. 36) Such rejection is perceived as similar to a loss of identity.

Schumann also attributes this reluctance on the part of the second-language learner to social and psychological factors that increase the distance between the learner and speakers of the target language. One of the factors affecting this distance is the attitude of each group toward the other. "If both groups positively value each other, these favorable views will be communicated to the learner and will enhance his acquisition of the target language." (1978, p. 79) A way to communicate favorable views is to show an awareness of and an appreciation for students' cultural backgrounds.

The reading text of *Noah and the Golden Turtle* was selected not only for its acculturation value but also for its ability to improve reading skills in the second language. According to the psycholinguistic model of reading, beginning readers must go beyond letter recognition, word recognition, and decoding to sound if they are to become fluent readers. Fluency, as defined by Kenneth Goodman, is the ability to sample text and from that sampling to predict what is to follow. (1971) The ability to predict the whole from only a part is based on the inherent redundancy in language. There are clues to meaning on many different levels of language—from phonetics to discourse. These clues reduce the alternatives from which to choose, and the reduction of alternatives leads to the "reduction of uncertainty" that is Frank Smith's definition of comprehension.*

These clues enable readers to predict. They then go on to test their predictions against information from previous samplings of the text, subsequent sampling, and their own stores of information about the topic under consideration. If the testing confirms the prediction, then the process proceeds with further sampling, and the cycle repeats itself, becoming recursive. If there is a miscue, readers pursue an alternate strategy, such as rereading or reading further, before predicting.

Second-language learners at the high-intermediate level who are literate in their own languages should not have much difficulty with the lower processing strategies of letter recognition and decoding to sound. (Their pronunciation may be poor, but they understand the concept.) They are, however, like young first-language readers: dependent on a mediated process in order to arrive at comprehension. They must go from the printed word to transla-

*Examples of such clue reductions include: an initial *t* can only be followed by a vowel or the letters *h*, *r*, or *w* (phonetic level); the plural morpheme *s* on the noun *boys* limits the subsequent verb to a plural (morphemic level); the words *the big* reduce the possible alternatives to an adjective or, more likely, a noun (syntactic level); and the word *consequently* signals that following information will be the result of preceding information.

tion in their own language. Until they are able to go directly to meaning, their fluency will be hampered, for instead of sampling, they are constrained to read word for word in a linear fashion at a slow rate of speed. The strategies employed by proficient first-language readers also can help second-language learners bypass the need to translate.

The stories presented in this text and the exercises that follow them are aimed at developing these higher level strategies (syntactic, lexical, and contextual), which in turn lead to accuracy in prediction and therefore fluency in second-language reading ability. However, these strategies alone are insufficient if the subject matter is totally foreign because accurate testing of predictions is partially dependent on previous knowledge of the subject matter. (For example, many scientific texts written in English are almost entirely incomprehensible to native speakers unless they work in the specific field.)

The choice of subject matter in this text reflects the student population of my classroom and my desire to provide appropriate reading material for my students—primarily Southeast Asian refugees, but Latin Americans and Europeans as well. The students' cultural backgrounds were, then, quite diverse, as is the case in many second-language classrooms. For that reason and for the pedagogical reasons already stated, I selected reading material from both Asian and Western folk and religious stories.

The *Southeast Asian Research Tools*, compiled by Dr. Charles Keyes, the *Indochinese Refugee Education Guides* of The Center for Applied Linguistics, and my students provided me with authentic material. It was difficult to assure familiarity with the stories on the part of all the students, so I chose stories that were familiar in terms of locale and customs. Furthermore, it is the nature of religious and folk stories to be fairly predictable since many of their themes are of universal interest and concern. And, finally, since my students were adults, I selected material that was not too childlike.

In this text, a similar Western story is presented after each Eastern story. This also increases the ability of students to predict because the second story is always a version of a topic with which they are already familiar. To further increase the usefulness of the text, the Eastern stories have been expanded to include one from China and one from India. (Various versions of the Indian tale are known all throughout the Eastern world.) Their Western counterparts are from Mexico.

It is hoped, then, that the selections will both facilitate the second-language reading process and aid in the acculturation of the learner. Intermediate-level students have the language skills necessary to begin using language in its integrative function, but

they must be motivated to do so. By acknowledging their cultural backgrounds and heritage in these stories and by presenting East-West counterparts, the text builds bridges between cultures. If students feel that they are not giving up their own heritage but widening it, they may be more willing to cross that bridge.

Sarah Skinner Dunn

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Teacher's Notes

Before students begin to read the text, the teacher might briefly describe what constitutes successful reading. This is helpful for many students because they may have preconceived notions about the value of reading slowly, word by word, and looking up all unknown vocabulary.

The teacher's description may be graphically demonstrated with an illustration:

1. The teacher selects a picture, partially covers it, then asks students to identify it.
2. Students begin to find the picture more easily identifiable as more and more of the cover is removed and the whole is seen.

The reading process is somewhat the same. The meaning of one word, one sentence, or one paragraph is sometimes unclear until the entire selection has been read. For that reason, students should be encouraged to read the entire selection without looking up each unknown word. Increasing their speed of reading will also help their comprehension. If they come to the end with only a vague understanding, they should reread the selection two or three times, and each time the meaning should become clearer.

From the beginning, students should understand that it is not necessary to comprehend every word they read. Because of the inherent redundancy of language, adequate comprehension is still possible. All of the glossed words are not necessary for the student to learn, but they are needed for understanding the story, so the teacher may wish to review them before students begin reading. Glossed words that may be useful for the students' recep-

tive vocabularies and vocabulary that may cause them problems have been selected for exercise work following each story. These exercises should help students determine the meanings of new words they encounter in their independent reading.

For those times when a dictionary is absolutely necessary, students should consult an English-English dictionary, preferably one written expressly for foreign students. Using a monolingual dictionary can be initially confusing for students. Therefore, it is helpful to provide a systematic introduction to dictionary usage. Many ESL dictionaries include such introductions.

The text itself is a collection of different types of stories: myths, legends, folk tales, religious stories, and parables. Throughout the course, the teacher may want to discuss the differences between these types.

Initial Presentation of the Story

The themes in most of the stories deal with human attitudes toward the basic concerns of life: love, fate, suffering, death, the hereafter. Before the story is read, the teacher might explore these attitudes with the class. If the teacher introduces the initial conflict or story line using carefully constructed questions, students often are able to predict the entire story before reading it.

The teacher first reads the story orally. Careful phrasing, intonation, and pronunciation will aid students' comprehension. The students themselves should not read orally because the text is not designed to improve pronunciation but reading comprehension, and oral reading on the part of students can inhibit comprehension. For homework, a second reading of each story may be assigned.

Several stories contain speed reading exercises. In these stories, the teacher should read orally up to a certain point (marked in the margin), then instruct students to read the rest of the selection as quickly as possible. When they are finished, they answer the questions in the *true/false* exercise, recording their answers in the first column. They then reread the same selection and again record their answers, this time using the second column. They should not look back at the story while doing the *true/false* exercise. These exercises demonstrate that even reading quickly allows comprehension of the essential outline of the story. The *true/false* statements are constructed with this in mind, so they are not concerned with details. When the students reread the story, the outline almost always becomes even clearer. The second column demonstrates this: a higher percentage of answers usually is correct in the second column than in the first.

Detailed Questioning

Detailed questioning should follow the initial reading of the story. These questions have not been included because the types of questions and the teacher's approach depend on the individual stories.

The general format of questions should be hierarchical in terms of difficulty: *yes/no*, *either/or*, *who/what/when/where*, *how/why*. With some of the simpler stories or with a more advanced class, the teacher may find it unnecessary to ask the easier kinds of questions or to analyze each sentence in detail.

The following is an example of the kind of detailed questioning the teacher might use for the second paragraph of the first story. As earlier noted, this type of questioning can be modified, depending on the needs of the class.

Did the mother take the child in her arms?
Was the child dead or alive?
Where did the mother go?
What was she asking for?
Whom did she ask to give her some medicine?
What would the medicine do?
Did the mother go to a holy man?
Was he at the first or the last house?
What was he known for?
What did he not have?
Why didn't he give her some medicine?

Vocabulary Work

A great deal of emphasis is put on vocabulary because if students hope to read successfully and efficiently in English, they must increase their vocabularies dramatically. Various types of vocabulary exercises, including vocabulary in context, synonyms, antonyms, idioms, literary expressions, the use of prepositions, two-word verbs, and word formation tables, are provided and should follow the teacher's detailed questioning. Some of these exercises may be assigned as homework and reviewed the next day in class. The idioms and literary expressions are best done in class because their meaning is often difficult for students to decipher on their own.

Because of the differences between spoken and written English, it is valuable to draw attention to those words rarely used in speech, *perish* as opposed to *die*, for example. It is also important to

explain to students the theory underlying the vocabulary in context exercises. The context in which words are encountered often provides necessary clues for students' understanding of new vocabulary. Therefore, the need for a dictionary can be substantially reduced. The students must first recognize the syntactic use of the word, try to predict its meaning from their current comprehension of the story, and then check that meaning against continued reading. Frequently, the text itself contains additional clues, and the exercise is built upon these clues. For example, at times the meaning can be determined because a synonym or antonym also has been given. The use of cause and effect or of association between an object and its use can provide clues to meaning. Likewise, the use of description and example can aid comprehension. (Clarke, 1979, p. 57)

A number follows each sentence in the context and synonym exercises. This number refers students back to the paragraph or section of the story where the word appears. By seeing how the word is used both in the story and in the exercise, students should be able to determine its meaning. (A by-product of these exercises is the development of scanning skills, for students must look quickly for a specific word from a larger selection.)

Students may work through the exercises on idioms and literary expressions individually and silently in class or together as a group. Again, they should do the exercises in the context of the story. If the meaning of a word is unclear, they should refer to the expression where it appears in the story.

Two-word verbs and preposition exercises may be seen as further vocabulary work because the words they entail must be learned in the same way unfamiliar words are. Once again, students are referred to the section in the story where the two-word verb or the word-plus-preposition appears. In the writing section of each lesson, students receive additional practice in the usage of these expressions.

The word formation tables are also vocabulary-building exercises. Each word-formation table lists the word as it appears in the story and most of its derivations, though there are no specific lessons on affixes. The use of suffixes and prefixes becomes self-evident as students study the successive tables, but depending on the needs of the students, it may be advisable to introduce the most common affixes and their meanings.

The teacher should also point out differences in meaning derived from the affixes. Students should understand that many of these words are for receptive rather than productive use. The tables will help them recognize variant words that they may encounter in their independent reading. By seeing a word in different contexts and by understanding it in those different contexts, they may later be able to use it productively.

Because the negative prefix is often a source of error, it has been included, usually in its adjectival form. The teacher may point it out if it can also be used in other forms. When the negative prefix changes—for example, *dis* for the verb and *un* for the adjective—both have been included. When there is no adjective form, the teacher may point out that participles may be used as adjectives, although the meanings of past and present participles are different when they are used as adjectives.

The sole pronunciation activity in the text is presented in connection with the word formation tables because the addition of affixes frequently changes the pronunciation of a word. Therefore, when introducing a table, the teacher should pronounce each word, asking students to repeat it. Furthermore, the teacher should review the formation tables carefully before presenting them in class to assure familiarity with the usage of the words. A reinforcement exercise follows each table.

The meaning of a word, if it is unclear, can be explained briefly. Another approach is to give an unfamiliar word to each student, have him or her look for it in context, then try to arrive at an approximate meaning that may be shared with the class.

All of the words used in the vocabulary exercises, except for the idioms and literary expressions, are listed at the end of the text. After each word, a number is given, identifying the story in which the word first appears.

Structure

The text is first and foremost a reader. Therefore, the few structure exercises presented were selected primarily to clarify the reading. However, since integrated skills should not be taught in isolation, there is some emphasis on writing. One learns to write as a result of reading because by reading good material, one is exposed to good writing. Therefore, the purpose of the structure exercises is both to help clarify the reading and to improve students' writing abilities.

The structure points covered in the text are:

Selection 1	Noun clauses as objects
Selection 2	Formation of the possessive
Selection 3	Two-word verbs
Selection 4	Verbs with gerund objects or infinitive objects
Selection 6	Clauses of reason and result
Selection 7	Subjunctive after <i>as if</i> or <i>as though</i>
Selection 8	Future conditions with <i>were</i> plus infinitive
Selection 9	Reported speech

Selection 10	Past perfect
Selection 14	Verbs with only infinitive objects

If students have a firm grasp of any of the structure points outlined above, then there is no need to include that particular exercise in the lesson plan.

Reading Comprehension

Before doing the reading comprehension section, students should have heard the story once, answered questions, worked through the vocabulary exercises, and reread the story on their own. Except for "The Mustard Seed" and "The Hare-Mark on the Moon," the reading comprehension exercises take a multiple choice format. These exercises are both a testing and a teaching device. Unlike the *true/false* questions in the speed reading sections, where students answer questions from memory, students may answer these comprehension questions by consulting the text. The exercise tries to extend comprehension beyond the simpler *yes/no, wh* approach of the initial intensive questioning. The categories of comprehension it seeks to develop are:

1. Plain sense (i.e., mainly factual, exact surface meanings)
2. Implications (i.e., inference, deduced information, emotional suggestion, figurative usage, etc.)
3. Relationships of thought (i.e., between sentences/paragraphs, summarizing)
4. Projective (i.e., questions where the answers require integration of data from the text with the pupil's own knowledge and/or experience)
5. Grammatical relationships (i.e., questions that demand a response to grammatical signals, e.g., structural words, word order for emphasis, subordination, relationship of time and tense) (Munby, 1979, p. 144)

Students initially are tested on their comprehension of the story. They answer the questions individually, recording their answers both in the book and on a separate sheet of paper, which is turned in to the teacher. The teacher can then determine the extent of each student's comprehension.

Group learning follows the individual testing. The students divide into groups. (It is a good idea to place more advanced students with slower students and also to have a variety of native languages within each group to ensure that everyone speaks English.) The members of each group then compare answers with one another and try to reach a consensus. Those who have answered

incorrectly learn by following the reasoning processes of the others.

Such an approach fosters rapport among students and creates a nonthreatening environment. This in turn encourages students to take risks. Risk-taking is an essential requirement for language learning. At first, the teacher may need to circulate and ask a few leading questions, but students quickly catch on to the process. After the groups have worked through the exercise, the class should correct it orally. If one group does not agree with another, each must give reasons to support its choice. Students should do as much of this work as possible, with the teacher only in the role of facilitator. An important element of that role is to direct students back to the text when there are questions. The teacher must also work through the exercise before presenting it to the class. By identifying in advance the different categories of comprehension, the teacher will be better prepared to direct students in their reasoning processes.

Dictation

Depending on how much time is allotted to the reading period in the overall class plan, dictation can be introduced at this time. Selection of suitable material is left to the teacher.

There are several different approaches to giving dictation.

1. The entire passage can be read through once at normal speed. The second reading is slower and broken up into meaningful phrases. The teacher pauses between phrases to give students time to write. The third reading is again at normal speed, during which time students check their writing.
2. In a spot dictation, except for eliminating the pauses, the teacher follows the same procedure as the one outlined above. Here, students have the passage in front of them except that certain words have been deleted and replaced by blanks. The students fill these in as the teacher reads.
3. Depending on the level of the class, a more difficult type of dictation may be given. A passage of about 100 words is read several times at normal speed by the teacher. Students then write it down from memory, using their own words when necessary. Such an approach to dictation aids students' writing abilities because they must create as well as copy.

Controlled Writing Practice

As mentioned earlier, this text places some emphasis on writing skills. It is mostly controlled writing. If the class has the ability to write independently, topics for writing are included with the topics

for discussion. Most of the controlled writing exercises are self-explanatory.

Various skill practices are provided in the exercises. One is additional practice in the use of two-word verbs and prepositions. Another skill provided in several exercises throughout the text is the writing of logical questions to match short answers that are already given. Before assigning these exercises, it is helpful to review the answers in class to determine if a *wh* question is required, and if so, which one is to be used. A sentence combining exercise is also provided. This exercise, in which students recombine sentences, can provide excellent board work and discussion of the range of possible combinations. Finally, several exercises on the use of transition words are included. The teacher should explain what a transition word does and what the meanings of the transition words in the exercises are before the students attempt the exercise. Otherwise, it will be nothing more than a guessing game.* Along these lines, writing exercises in both "The Seed of Good Conversation" and "The Sun God and the Moon God" require students to put sentences in the correct order. Pointing out transition words will help them determine that order.

Topics for Discussion and Writing

Discussion and writing topics are the final activities presented in each selection unit. They attempt to explore deeper cultural and symbolic meanings in the story and therefore require a fairly high level of speaking and writing ability. The teacher must determine whether the students will profit from or be frustrated by such an activity before attempting it. If the latter is the case, I recommend omitting this section. If the teacher chooses to include it, certain topics can be developed in paragraph or composition form. If so, discussion is an important step in this development. If the teacher organizes student ideas in outline form on the board, students will be better able to organize their writing.

Independent Reading

Independent reading on the part of students is to be encouraged most of all. Offer them a wide selection of reading material from

*An excellent source for the teacher on the use of transition words is Ronald Mackay, "Teaching the Information-Gathering Skills," in *Reading in a Second Language*, eds. Mackay, Barkman, and Jordan (Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, Inc., 1979), p. 88. Mackay uses the technical term *discourse marker* instead of *transition word*.