

Using Task-based and Reader-response Approaches in Teaching Children's Literature in the ESL Classroom¹

Shu-mei Chung* & Mei-yan Lee**

Abstract

This study uses task-based and reader response approaches to examine how the instruction works to booster students' motivation when teaching children's literature in an ESL classroom. The subjects of the study were fifty non-English major sophomores. The focal materials were the novel *The Polar Express: Trip to the North Pole*, and the film adaption. Tasked-based and response-centered activities, including learning sheets, group discussion, and essay-question writing activities, were also adopted in the lesson.

To begin with, students were divided into groups, with five members in each group. Each group was assigned one chapter and asked to prepare a vocabulary list and a summary. The students were assigned to watch the movie in the school's media center and then produce feedback about it. They were encouraged to produce multiple interpretations to cultivate critical thinking skills and asked to participate in classroom discussions. Their responses and reflections were captured in the essay-question writing activities. Finally, these response journals were collected as the results of the study, enabling the teacher to better understand students' interpretations of and reflections on *The Polar Express: Trip to the North Pole*, and also evaluate the feasibility of using a movie adaption alongside a novel and the important teaching strategies in the lesson designed to teach children's literature.

This kind of response-centered learning of children's literature thus fits in the category of a reader response approach, since they both emphasize the significance of a reader who can work with the author/text to generate meaning. The teacher may start with the situation of readers and guide them into an understanding of the text through their own responses to it. This includes all initial responses to the title, to what the students believe is happening, to possibly naïve, or ignorant, or misguided responses. This is because the reader creates their own 'poem' (a term taken from Louise Rosenblatt) through their interaction with the text.

The results of the study showed that, by encouraging students to generate multiple interpretations and reflections of children's literature, it is not too difficult for them to develop their critical thinking skills when learning in English. The use of children's literature as an alternative teaching material not only enhanced the learners' language acquisition and cultivated their literacy competence, but also helped free their imaginations, leading to more positive effects and responses.

Key words: task-based, reader response, movie adaptation, rosenblatt, critical thinking

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如何以任務導向與讀者反應教學法 在 ESL 課程教授兒童文學

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摘要

本研究以任務導向與讀者反應教學法，檢驗在 ESL 課程中教授兒童文學是否能激發學生的學習動機。研究對象為 50 位非英語主修的大二學生，教材為《北極特快車》的小說與電影，而其他的任務導向與讀者反應活動，包括學習單、小組討論以及論述題寫作活動也將在課程中呈現。

首先，學生五人一組分為數個組別，每組分派一個章節且被要求準備該章節的單字表及摘要，學生們也被指派在家裡或在學校的視聽自學教室，先行觀賞以該小說改編的電影做為功課。此外，老師必須鼓勵學生對故事或影片做多元的詮釋，藉以培養他們的批判思考能力，進而要求他們在課堂討論時多發表意見。在這方面，論述題的寫作活動也能看出他們的反應與回饋。稍後這些論述寫作紙本將會被收集起來，作為本研究的結果，使教學老師得以更瞭解學生對《北極特快車》的小說與電影的詮釋和回饋，同時也能評估使用電影改編與其原著的可行性，以及在教授兒童文學時一些重要的教學策略。

這種以任務導向學習兒童文學的方法十分契合讀者反應的範疇，因為兩者皆強調讀者能夠親自與作者及其文本接近而產生閱讀意義的重要性。本研究的老師們視個別學生讀者的情況為依據，經由他們自身對文本的回應，引導他們進入文本、瞭解文本。要做到如此，就必須包涵所有學生最初對書名或影片名稱的回應，以及他們認為在故事中發生了什麼事的回應，即便天真、無知或是被誤導了，老師也必須包容，這是因為經由他們和文本的互動，讀者創造了他們自己的『詩』（羅森佈雷特的術語）的結果。

本研究結果顯示，藉由鼓勵學生對兒童文學產生多元的詮釋和回應，激發他們在學習英語時同時發展批判性思考能力，並不是件難事。在語言教學上應用兒童文學可以是另一項教材選擇，這樣的教材不僅強化學習者的語言習得，培養他們的讀寫能力，也能幫助他們釋放想像力，導向更積極的學習效果與回應。

關鍵字：任務導向的、讀者反應、同名電影改編、羅森布拉特、批判性思考

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Introduction

When it comes to learning a language, it is necessary to get involved with the culture associated with it, and literature provides an excellent way to achieve this, which is why students majoring English are strongly advised to study the Bible, Shakespeare or classic literature. However, English major students account for only a small proportion of the ESL student population, and most of the other students do not have the same proficiency as the English majors do. Therefore, in order to use relatively simple literature to teach ESL students, the instructors in this study chose children's literature as the focal materials.

Although teaching ESL students using children's literature was widely recommended by scholars over two decades ago, this practice has not been adopted by many ESL teachers, noted by Flickinger (qtd. in Mikulecky, 2007). Mikulecky stated that a possible reason for this is the high cost of books and thus difficulty in accessing them (2007). But he also states that, with the rapid development of Internet technology, online resources related children's literature are now much more available, and so that they can be used for extensive L2 reading by ESL students (2007).

In Taiwan, teachers are faced with a number of different situations to those outlined by Mikulecky, although they do also face the problem of sufficient Internet resources. One difference is that children's books are relatively inexpensive. In addition, watching movies is a popular activity among students and most schools can provide DVDs in their media centers, so it is quite natural and reasonable to ask students to watch the movie adaption of a literary work as a supplementary material. Therefore, in this study the instructors mainly focus on teaching ESL using both the original book and movie adaption of a work of children's literature.

Tasked-based and response-centered activities, including independent reading, movie watching, learning sheets, group discussion, and essay-question writing activities, were adopted in the teaching design in this work, thus following a reader response approach. This study aims to show how task-based and reader response approaches can be used in teaching children's literature in an ESL classroom to promote students' motivation in learning English.

Literature Review

Benefits of Teaching Children's Literature in an ESL Classroom

Non-English major students do not have the same proficiency as their English major counterparts do, so that the relatively plain English that is used in children's literature is suitable for them, especially for those at the beginning and intermediate levels. Liu and Nation (1985) and Laufer (1989) stated that a reader will not be able to guess the meaning of unknown words from the context unless they are familiar with approximately 95% of the words on a page (qtd. in Mikulecky, 2007). Children's books meet this requirement for most readers, as most of them contain only terms drawn from around 2000-3000 L2 words, and have a vocabulary level that is similar to that of an average 9-10 year-old L1 native speaker (Mikulecky, 2007).

Ghosn (2002) also suggested that, since children's books are written to encourage children to enjoy reading, they rarely contain passages that resemble classroom lectures. However, carefully selecting which book will be used with ESL learners is a crucial task. Some studies show that if children's books are selected carefully, such as those which have worldwide appeal and mature subject matters, then they can also be suitable for adult ESL learners (Liang, 2006). Ho (2002) examined the use of children's literature in EFL

learning, and stated that such materials could help in promoting students' reading abilities, and thus raising their literary capabilities (2000).

Some studies, such as Lipp's (1989), have even assessed how picture books can be used in EFL classrooms (qtd. in Liang, 2006). Wang (2008) gave an assignment titled Picture-Book Creating to his students in his class on children literature and found out that it helped his students develop their critical thinking effectively. Moreover, Liang (2006) used children's horror stories to teach her EFL adult students, and found that their language competence improved by studying the materials that had "suspense, simple language, and a fast-paced but clear plot." Therefore, if children's books are carefully chosen, no matter what kind of genre they are they can all be used to boost adult learners' language acquisition, just like English textbooks.

Benefits of Using Reader Response Approach in ESL Teaching

First coming to prominence in the 1960s and '70s, reader-response theory argues that the reader, who is an active agent, imparts "real existence" to the work being read and realizes its meaning through interpretation. Reader-response criticism claims that literature should be treated as a performing art in which every reader re-creates his or her own, unique, text-related meaning.¹ This *reader-response criticism* is in contrast to the theories of formalism and the New Criticism, in which the reader's role in re-creating literary works is ignored. In the field of ESL teaching/research, the reader-response approach, like the method of teaching children's literature, has been also used by a number of scholars, especially recently (e.g., I-Ping Ho, 2006) though it is not yet widely adopted by many ESL teachers. However, this theory was actually well-developed in ESL teaching context by Rosenblatt, starting more than 70 years ago.

In Rosenblatt's famous texts *Literature as Exploration* (1938, 1995) and "The Reader, The Text, The Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work" (1978, 1994), she proposed the transactional theory of reading, which has been very influential on reader response theory, as noted by Ho (2006). Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading suggests that there is a transaction between the reader and the text when the performance of reading literature takes place. Here, "transaction" means an unprecedented experience which occurs and is shared by both the reader and the text, and which occurs without interruption during each reading. Rosenblatt argued that:

A novel or poem or play remains merely ink-spots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols. The literary work exists in the live circuit set up between reader and text; the reader infuses intellectual and emotional meanings into the pattern of verbal symbols, and those symbols channel his thoughts and feelings. (Rosenblatt, 1938; 1995, p.24)

Because each reader may apply his or her personal experience, knowledge, beliefs, and meanings to the reading process, every written piece has different meaning to different people. In addition, "[Rosenblatt] distinguished between different kinds of reading with her defined 'stances.' [She] placed all reading transactions on a continuum between 'aesthetic' - or reading for pleasure, experiencing the poem and 'efferent' - or reading to gain meaning."²

It was exactly these two aims, "reading for pleasure" and "reading to gain meaning," which we found that our students could achieve with the aid of learning children's literature, that lead us to believe in the benefits of using a reader response approach in the ESL classroom. In this study, the instructors remained open to the students' diverse

¹ See Reader response criticism. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reader-response>

² Rosenblatt often referred to a written work as a "poem" in her writing. See Louise Rosenblatt http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louise_Rosenblatt

interpretations of the texts they read, and encouraged them to develop their critical thinking skills alongside their imaginations when presenting their interpretations. However, before such work can begin, the teachers have to choose suitable literary works for the students, just as Bushman and Bushman had recommended, as it is important to offer students texts which they can relate to, and which can match their language levels, personal experience, and emotional maturity (qtd. in Ho, 2006).

Ho also reviewed other very significant works in his "Using Young Adult Literature and Reader Response in the EFL," like Vandergrift's model of reader response (1990), which includes six patterns of reader response applied by students in reviewing a literary work, Wilhelm's (1997) assertion of three different categories/dimensions of response: evocative, connective, and reflective, and Probst's (2004, qtd. in Ho, 2006) statement of categorizing response as personal response, topical response, interpretive response, formal response, and broader literary concerns. Ho (2006) confirmed that the reader response approach is beneficial for teachers in many respects, like providing students with learning materials that can boost their critical thinking and use of response strategies, monitoring their group discussion, and examining their responses and reflections.

Benefits of the Task-based Approach in ESL Teaching

The task-based approach is one of various syllabus models closely related to communicative language teaching that have been proposed over the last twenty years. Instead of designing a traditional syllabus with lists of grammatical uses, function, concepts, and pronunciations, a syllabus designer who applies a task-based approach should offer a range of tasks for the learners to perform outside the classroom in their everyday "real world" (Nunan, 2001).

Nunan (2001) scrutinized the three crucial elements related to language pedagogy, namely language data, information, and opportunities for practice, from the perspective of task-based language teaching. He found out that, in EFL learning contexts, learners need both authentic and non-authentic data. In this context, authentic data mean samples of spoken or written language that have not been specifically written for the purposes of language teaching, like daily conversation, while non-authentic data are dialogues and reading passages that have been specially written, like the passages that appear in most textbook. While some task-based pedagogy scholars have insisted that explicit, deductive information is unnecessary, Nunan (2001) supported using an inductive approach, and with regard to designing practice opportunities for students, classified between tasks, exercises and activities. His work highlighted the main difference between target or real-world tasks and pedagogical exercises and activities, which is that the former have a nonlinguistic result, which are things that students do outside of the classroom, while the latter are designed to activate the processes of acquisition.³

A task-based approach thus provides teachers with a fairly flexible range of choices in ESL teaching. With a task-based approach, ESL teaching is not limited being only within the classroom, and the task-based approach can always coexist with any other language pedagogy. Moreover, this approach encourages EFL learners to concentrate on the tasks they are doing more than the language (Chou, 2007), and thus to some extent reduces some of the pressures they usually face in classroom work, with Hsu (2003) noting that her students were more active in writing in task-based learning contexts (qtd. in Chou, 2007). In addition, in the current study the researchers also found out that students were more confident when following the process-oriented and learner-centered task-based language teaching process presented in this work, as Chou and Hsu had

³ See <http://www3.telus.net/linguisticsissues/syllabusdesign.html>

observed earlier, because they felt less pressure than they usually did in other pedagogical exercises and activities.

Chen and Liao (2007) in their paper “Developing Audience Awareness of Narrative Writing through the Task-based Approach,” also viewed the task-based approach as one that could help to promote learner interactions during other classroom activities, with the students applying the target language. According to Chen and Liao (2007), Murphy (2003) and Skehan (1998), both the task-based approach can guide L2 learners toward reaching diverse pedagogical targets of second language acquisition (SLA). In addition, Ockey (1988), in his report on an activity in which a group of first-year undergraduates published their book of fairy tales right after they finished a series of tasks, demonstrated that a task-based approach can integrate the four language skills (qtd. in Chen & Liao, 2007). Chen (2006), also integrated a task-based approach and reading-to-writing instruction to explore and analyze student’s responses to reading and then writing about the selected literary text. These earlier studies all provide evidences that a task-based approach can benefit ESL teaching.

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects in this study were fifty non-English major sophomores from a university in Tainan, Taiwan. Their average age was 19, and their average length of English learning was seven years.

Materials

The text, *The Polar Express: Trip to the North Pole* (the novel by Ellen Weiss), the picture book, *The Polar Express* (by Chris Van Allsburg), and the movie, *The Polar Express*, were selected for this study. Some significant pages of the picture book were shown on a projector screen in class and students are required to watch the film version in the school’s media center. By providing different versions of the same story as comprehensible input, we hoped that this could facilitate more effective language learning, as teaching aids, like videos and picture books, are believed to be very helpful for students (Chen 2006). Videos are able to stimulate students’ listening ability and reinforce their comprehension of intonation and pronunciation, while picture books offer them an easy way to understand short and easy-to-memorized sentences.

The story of *The Polar Express: Trip to the North Pole* is very suitable for language learning because of its well-known subject—Santa Claus. A 119-page story written by Ellen Weiss, *The Polar Express: Trip to the North Pole* shows a young boy’s dream-like journey to learn whether Santa Claus is real or not. The journey begins when he decides to climb on-board a train that suddenly appears in his front yard. In this journey he learns many important life lessons and finally regains his faith in Santa Claus.

The exciting scenes in the text, particularly those shown and re-created in the film version (like the scene in which the train rides quickly across frozen ice and tundra), draw students’ interest, and thus motivates them to read the text or watch the film outside the classroom. The students were also encouraged not to see this text-reading or film-watching as preparation for their school tests, but instead as an opportunity to understand the universal values gained from the lessons presented in the text and movie, like cherishing friendship, being honest and brave, and simply keeping faith. Students can be exposed to these universal values through the learning of a foreign language.

However, the selected reading material does not offer a very precise indicator with regard to its linguistic difficulty, as seen, for example, in the Penguin Young Readers’

Series. More specifically, the books in Penguin Young Readers' Series Level 2 contains up to 700 headwords that are suitable for EFL young learners who have already studied 100-200 hours of English (Chou & Chen 2007). However, the book chosen for this study is categorized as a junior novel on the book cover, it is thus assumed that the text might be a little more difficult than those books aimed at children who have a minimal knowledge of 2000-3000 L2 words (Mikulecky, 2007).

Instruments

Written Report and Oral Presentation. Each group had to produce one A4-sized report in which they contributed their selection of significant vocabulary (about ten words) from the chapter they had been assigned, and briefly summarized the content. This written report was used as the material in each group's short oral presentation.

Study Sheets. Two kinds of study sheets are employed: a cloze test and a multiple choice test in the mid-term and essay writing in the final. Students were required to participate in these tests during the mid-term exam week and final exam week. The scores from these tests were used as a part of the student evaluations, although other methods of evaluation, such as written report (summary of each individual chapter) and oral presentation were equally important.

DVD. Students are required to watch the video *The Polar Express* at home or in the school's media center before the class so that they would be able to participate in some role plays and make oral presentations related to the story.

Content Knowledge Questionnaire. The Content Knowledge Questionnaire (see Appendix D) consisted of six questions, in which the first three measured the subjects' content knowledge of the main ideas of the text and the others examined the subjects' critical thinking skills based on the text and video.

Self Access Worksheet. A Self Access Worksheet was designed to measure to what extent have students understood the whole work/story. This worksheet tested the students' basic knowledge about the book, content, language (words, phrases or expressions learned from reading the book), and asked for short answers about their opinions.

Procedure and Instruments

The first author of this study has been teaching at the university for more than eleven years and the second author has also been teaching at the same university for more than twenty years. Based on their teaching experience, creating a task-based and reader-response environment for students is quite feasible in an ESL classroom. The three instructional stages employed in the study are explained in some detail below.

In the warm-up stage, students were divided into groups, with five members in each group. Each group was assigned one chapter and asked to prepare the vocabulary list and to write a summary. (See Appendices A, B, and C). Each group was then asked to make an oral presentation on their written report, following the order of the chapters.

During the reading-instruction stage, the guidelines such as the criteria for choosing children's literature were provided for students to help them access the literary text. In addition, students were asked to watch the movie in the school's media center and then produce some feedback. They were encouraged to work with multiple interpretations to cultivate their critical thinking skills and then required to participate in classroom discussions.

In the writing-task stage, the students were encouraged to write their responses and reflections in the essay-question writing activities. These writing activities thus generated response journals, which were collected as data to be used in the study, enabling the teacher to better understand the benefits of employing children's literature in an EFL

classroom. Finally, the students were required to complete a Content Knowledge Questionnaire and Self Access Worksheet (see Appendices D and E), in order to provide the instructors with their feedback with regard to the text.

Data Analysis

This study mainly focuses on qualitative analysis. A range of qualitative comparisons were made between each group's written report and oral presentation (see Appendices A, B and C), and there was also an evaluation of the mid-term study sheets. The purpose of this was to see if the subjects anticipated the chapters they were assigned in previous class, as well as their understanding of the text. Secondly, a textual analysis of the Content Knowledge Questionnaire and Self Access Worksheet was conducted in order to discover to what extent the subjects developed their critical thinking abilities, and also their responses to the questionnaire.

For instance, Student Model 1, 2 and 3 shown on Appendices A, B and C are chosen to be put in comparison here in order to show how different each group's learning method can be. Student Model 1 chooses to follow a more traditional way of learning English, which can be seen in the way they arrange the vocabulary list. That is, they put each word's Chinese translation right after the word as an explanation and the tone in their summary is quite conservative. Student Model 2 tries to explain the meaning of the vocabulary totally in other words in English; the tone of the summary sounds quite upbeat and the Christmas ballad song is also quoted in the middle of the passage to support their idea of Christmas. Student Model 3 focuses on the part of speech of the vocabulary, and it is obvious to see that this group pays much attention to the grammatical usage throughout the whole part of their summary. It can be said that when students are given the tasks of written report and chances of oral presentation, they know much better about what part of English learning they need to strengthen and what kind of knowledge about the text they want to share with their classmates after reading it.

Result and Discussion

The results of the study showed that, by encouraging students to generate multiple interpretations and reflections with regard to a children's book, critical thinking skills in English learning are easier to acquire and practice. Using a children's book as an alternative teaching material not only enhanced the learners' language acquisition and cultivated their literacy, but also helped free their imaginations leading to positive effects and responses. Most of the subjects had a positive attitude toward the reading-related activities, and stated that the group discussion were quite beneficial, enabling them to share their reading experience and engage in peer competition at the same time, while movie version of the book reinforced their impression of the text.

One phenomenon worth further exploration is that most of the subjects reported some problems with the amount of unfamiliar descriptive vocabulary in the text. The instructors responded to this by encouraging the students to relax, while at the same time asking them to build up a network of such words according to each chapter's plot. This important feedback from the students shows that, the input of much new vocabulary through cooperative reading in groups was more stimulating and effective than when input through a teacher's one-way vocabulary instruction. In addition, the students also reflected that it was fair to assign one group one chapter, as this lessened the workload for the whole class with regard to each individual having to look up all the new words in every chapter, as well as activating peer interactions.

Conclusions

Instruction using children's literature opens a door to cultural diversity and various literary genres for ESL learners. It also helps foster students' reading habits and offers a bridge from their current level to the next one. Combining both task-based and reader-response approaches, children's literature instruction can be a suitable and useful tool in the ESL classroom, as it not only cultivates students' critical thinking skills and literature comprehension, but also enhances peer cooperation and communication. This study shows that, as long as the goal of arousing students' interest in reading literature can be achieved, it is feasible to use a text, picture book, and film that all tell the same children's story in the ESL classroom, even though the students were all non-English major sophomores with an average age of 19. Based on the classroom observations and further research, this study thus has some useful implications for teaching and learning using children's literature.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Written Report and Oral Presentation

Student Model 1

Chapter 2: The Last Passenger

I. Vocabulary

hesitate (a.) 猶豫不決	spectacles (n.) 眼鏡	clipboard (n.) 文件夾
crucial (a.) 至關重要的	shudder (v.) 不寒而	jerk (v.) 猛拉
locomotive (n.) 火車頭	pajama (n.) 睡袍	erupt (v.) 爆發
lurch (v.) 蹣跚	frantic (a.) 瘋狂	clamber (v.) 攀登
vestibule (n.) 前庭	fearsome (a.) 可怕的	

II. Summary

After the boy got on the train, the conductor took out a clipboard and pointed to a name on a list. He asked the boy if it was his name. Under the name, there were the words: "... no letter to Santa.... Your sister has to put the milk and cookie out by herself." The Conductor shock his head and told the boy that this was his crucial year. Why did he hesitate to get on broad?

The train shuddered and began to creep, the boy finally decided to climb abroad. On the train he met many kids filled with wonders. While Know-It-All turned his head and looked through the window, he found that they were all on the other side of the tracks. The conductor stopped the train to pick up the last passenger—the Lonely Boy. At first, the Lonely Boy did not have intention to board the train, but finally he changed his mind and ran after the slowly moving train. As the Boy pulled the emergency brake, the Lonely Boy managed to climb up the train.

Appendix B

Written Report and Oral Presentation

Student Model 2

Chapter 8: Santa's New Concept

I. Vocabulary

1. blissfully: joyfully
2. ignorant: knowing little or nothing
3. gust: sudden violent rush of wind
4. tunnel: underground of passage
5. whack: strike or beat vigorously
6. immense: extremely large
7. wedge: piece of wood or metal that is thick at one end and narrows at the other to a sharp edge, used to split wood or rock.
8. gorge: narrow steep-sided village
9. zigzag: turning right and left alternately at sharp angles
10. flutter: make nervous and confused
11. mesmerized: hold the attention of completely
12. chatter: talk quickly, continuously
13. dejected: depressed, sad
14. surveillance: careful watch kept on sb. suspected of doing wrong

II. Summary

The Boy and the Girl were back in the passenger car, and everything looked as it had before. As they glanced into the observation car, the Boy noticed that the Lonely boy wasn't there. They headed toward the door. When they went to the icy platform outside and jumped across the gap to enter the observation car. When they entered it, they heard the beautiful, melancholy Christmas ballad sung by the Lonely Boy.

I'm wishing on a star
And trying to believe
That even though it's far,
He'll find the Christmas Eve

I guess that Santa's busy
'cause he's never come around
I think of him
When Christmas comes to town.

The Girl joined the song, but the Lonely Boy was not startled as his song became a duet. They represented both sides of Christmas: the Lonely Boy's singing was sad and haunting, the Girl's warm and joyous.

As they reached the North Pole, it was 11:55. The conductor told the kids to gather at the center of the city, one of them would be the lucky children to receive the first Christmas gift. The lonely boy said, "Christmas isn't for me." The Girl pleaded, "It's a time for giving, and being thankful and for friends and family." She told him that he couldn't stay there by himself.

Appendix C

Written Report and Oral Presentation

Student Model 3

Chapter 11: In the Sack

I. Vocabulary

canister (n.)	unflappable (adj.)	maneuver (n.)
mystified (adj.)	plunge (v.)	spectacular (adj.)
corkscrew (n.)	retort (v.)	neutral (adj.)
chute (n.)	compass (n.)	sprint (v.)
hocus-pocus (n.)	rig (v.)	vortex (n.)
zeppelin (n.)	plummet (n.)	spiral (v.)

II. Summary

The children climbed into the canister. The Girl had no idea which button to press to start the machine. As the Lonely Boy shouted, "There!" the Girl's finger paused over the middle button. Without hesitation, the Girl pushed the middle button, the hatch slammed down. They went off. The ride was over before they knew it, as the canister slid to a last stop. They arrived at the Great Gift-Wrapping Hall. A solitary present was chugging toward them on the conveyor belt. The present was moving, heading toward a hole in the wall at the far end of the belt. The children jumped onto the conveyor belt and sprang toward the hole. They found themselves slid down a huge chute. The gigantic sack of presents was hanging from an enormous zeppelin. As the zeppelin continued to descend, three elves appeared to look at the mouth of the sack and looked at them. One of them said, "A'right, youse stowaways... party's over."

Appendix D

Content Knowledge Questionnaire

1. Why is the protagonist of the story referred to simply as “the Boy?” Similarly, why are the other characters referred to simply as “the Lonely Boy,” “the Conductor,” “the Know-It-All,” and so on?
2. The first chapter is titled, “A Young Man In Need of Answers.” What, then, are the questions the young man has to answer?
3. The Boy keeps in his dresser drawer a “small stack of framed black-and-white photos.” What is the significance of these photos?
4. Think about the following passage: “Then he heard the ring of a sleigh bell. It was not, however, the thin, tinny sound of the bell on his father’s cap. No, this bell had a full, rich, joyful jingle. This was a wonderful sound” (6). What does this comparison of the sounds of the bells say to you?
5. While his fellow passengers on the Polar Express are thrilled by the Christman window display at Herplosheimer’s Department Store, the Boy seems surprisingly unimpressed. The “clockwork Santa” to the Boy is “an obvious fake” (13). What does this say about the difference between the Boy and the other passengers?
6. As the Boy becomes the Man several years later (118), he finds out that most of his friends and even his sister Sarah can no longer hear the sweet sound of the bell and yet he still can hear it. What does this bell symbolize? Does it have anything to do with truly believing or not believing?

Appendix E

SELF ACCESS WORKSHEET

NOVELS, THRILLERS, SHORT STORIES, ETC.

I. FACTS ABOUT THE BOOK

Title:

Author:

Type of book/genre:

When published:

II. CONTENT

If you have read an anthology of short stories, then answer the following questions about a story in the book.

1. Where does a story take place?
2. When is it set?
3. The plot: This is a story about
4. Characters: Write down the names of the main characters, the role of each one in the story, and 2 or 3 adjectives to describe them.
5. Message: Does the book seem to have a 'message'? If so, what is it?

III. LANGUAGE

Write down three or four words, phrases or expressions you have learned from reading this book.

IV. OPINION

1. Choose some of the following adjectives to describe the book:

light hearted	gripping	moving	tedious	gloomy	amusing
thought-provoking	compelling	well-crafted	depressing		

What other adjectives could you use to describe it?

2. Would you recommend this book to your friends? Why?
3. Does this book remind you of any writers or stories in your own language? If so, which ones?