

Teaching Literature through Activity-Based Pedagogy for Enhancing Student Engagement in Teaching Mr. Know-All

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Abstract

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This research article explores the implementation of activity-based pedagogy to enhance student engagement in teaching literature, with a specific focus on W. Somerset Maugham's short story Mr. Know-All. Drawing from reflective classroom practice at the University with undergraduate students, the study demonstrates how student-centered activities centered on discussion, questioning, and the Think-Pair-Share (TPS) strategy transform passive reading into active, collaborative meaning-making. Activity-based learning shifts the classroom dynamic from teacher-dominated instruction to one where students actively participate through hands-on tasks, group interactions, and critical reflection, fostering deeper comprehension, critical thinking, communication skills, and emotional investment in literary texts. The methodology employs a qualitative, experience-based descriptive approach grounded in the researcher teaching experience of the story. The article details practical activities: pre-reading discussions on judging appearances, character analysis of Mr. Kelada, focused exploration of the pivotal necklace scene, and thematic discussions on tolerance, sacrifice, and prejudice. It further proposes tiered questioning (literal, analytical, and evaluative) to scaffold comprehension and critical analysis, alongside TPS activities that encourage individual reflection, peer dialogue, and whole-class sharing on issues like prejudgment and moral sacrifice. Teachers can generate various activities to make learners more engaged and creative in teaching and learning environment. Teachers can create activities that generate interest among the participants and become more engaged learners. The integration of such methods not only enhances language skills and literary appreciation but also cultivates empathy, analytical abilities, and social interaction among students.

Keywords: *teaching literature, activity-based pedagogy, questioning, discussion, TPS*

Introduction

Learning is most effective when students are actively engaged in various activities themselves (Marchand Martella, & Schneider, 2024). Teachers must create various engagement activities to engage learners, thereby enhancing teaching and learning (Paudel & Shrestha, 2024). One of the many ways that teachers can make teaching and learning more activity-oriented is via activity-based learning. Activity Based Learning is defined as a learning process in which students are constantly engaged (Panko et al., 2007) in various tasks and activities keeping the content and teaching area at the center. It is defined as creating tasks, activities, and situations that guide students to acquire, understand, and apply new information and skills by requiring them not just to think but also to do and feel, engaging them practically, personally, and socially (Geneva Global, 2021). It is a student-centered approach that involves students actively in exercises, which consist of hands-on activities, problem-solving, group discussions, and projects, shifting focus from the teacher as the only source of knowledge to the student as an active participant. Activity-based teaching and learning revolves around engaging students through active participation in various activities (Ikbal, 2023). Students are made active through many activities and are encouraged to participate actively rather than being just the passive recipients of information in the class (Odum et al., 2021).

The main goal is to change the focus from traditional teacher-centered instruction to learning experiences that are student-centered. Students participate in practical exercises, problem-solving assignments, group discussions, role plays, projects, experiments and other interactive activities in activity-centered teaching and learning (Ziheng & Xiaodong, 2022). It develops learners' ability to participate in various activities enhancing their comprehension of the subject matter as well. Students' creative and critical abilities and problem-solving abilities can be enhanced through activity-centered approaches if they are used with planning and care (Anwer, 2019). Various language skills can be enhanced through activity-based teaching and learning. Developing language skills must go beyond the more mechanical meaning-preserving activities like repetition, dictation, reading aloud, and phonetic transcription, which are currently out of favor in communication-oriented language teaching (Harmer, 2012).

This article is mainly based on designing teaching and learning activities, to teach language through literature, to make learning process more effective by using various activities with learners. Students can be made more active participants in the learning process through various activities that revolve around the learning process. Based on the classroom experience and the ideas generated through reflection on the various activities involved in teaching and learning, various activities are recommended to make teaching and learning more effective. This is an attempt to recommend some of the activities that are influential for language teachers in designing classroom activities for learners. The article mainly presents how teachers can devise various activities around the discussion method, questioning method, and think, pair, share (TPS) method to enhance students' learning and creative and critical thinking abilities. The ideas generated in the article could be useful for teachers to design various activities to teach language through literary text.

Review of Literature

Literature and language are closely connected and cannot be avoided (Agustin Llach, 2007). Literature contains language, and through literature, language can be taught and learned in an effective

way (Mohamad Fikray & Habil, 2022). Learners are always motivated to read story, drama, poems, plays and other literary genres. As Agustin Llach (2007) mentions, "Literature reading is, no doubt, a communicative activity and literary texts are, who could nowadays deny such a thing, authentic examples of language use." Being an authentic material, if we teach language through literature, learners can learn language in a better and more influential way (Ravi, 2016). English literature component is designed to help students become more proficient in the language and to help them produce the artistic aspect of the language via their own responses (Mustakim, Mustapha, & Lebar, 2018). Using literary texts in EFL instruction in Nepal can be a useful tool for improving students' language learning outcomes, fostering communicative and linguistic (Gywali, 2023).

Using literature in the language classroom has several advantages. The first, most important reason to use literature in the language classroom is that literature includes the cultural, moral and social values (Kumar, 2023). So, through literature we can not only teach language but also the values associated with the literary text we are intended to teach. The second reason for using literature in language classes is associated with exposing learners to a wide range of terminologies, idioms, vocabulary, and sentence patterns. Teaching English literature enhances learners' linguistic and intercultural competence which provides course developers and researchers insights into bringing the literature content in literature teaching (Bist & Kandel, 2025). When learners are taught through literature, they can develop their mastery over these areas and can become more proficient learners. Their language skills and abilities can be developed through literature. The third reason for using literature with language learners is to enhance their creative and critical thinking. By reading the interpretations, themes, and characters, learners can develop their critical thinking. Learners' analytical abilities can be developed through using literature in the language classroom (Kumar, 2023).

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative experience-based descriptive methodology grounded in reflective teaching practice. The research is based on the researcher's personal classroom experience of teaching the short story *Mr. Know All* by W. Somerset Maugham to undergraduate second semester students. The class size consists for 38 students studying in undergraduate level at the university. The researcher adopted various exploitable activities keeping the story at the center. The activities that the researcher has used in the class has been presented in the article. The approach focused on how discussion, questioning, and TPS activities can be designed and used for making the learners more engaged in the literature classroom. Various activities can be designed to make learners engaged during teaching and learning are discussed in the article. The study was based on one short story entitled *Mr. Know All* by W. Somerset Maugham. The study was conducted upon undergraduate students. The story was taught over several instructional sessions as part of the prescribed syllabus.

Results and Discussion

Based on the teaching experience and activities designed to teach '*Mr. Know All*' by W. Somerset Maugham the following activities were designed. As a researcher, I kept very close eye upon the students' behaviors and the changes that were resulted during the presentation and practice stage of the teaching. The learners were observed and the record of their behavior were recorded as the reflection of the class during and after the presentation of the class. The following activities were designed to teach the class during their presentation of the course.

Discussion Activities

Discussion transforms literature from a solitary experience into a collaborative meaning process (Wang et al., 2024). Discussion develops reading, interpreting, and criticizing skills among participants (Manzollilo, 2016). Discussion develops their ability of expressing ideas without embarrassment which can develop their ability because students will learn how to complete the task by sharing and correcting the ideas from one student to other students (Ur, 1996). The teacher divides a small group discussion. Four to five students may make up each group. The students were divided into groups, sit across from one another, and are free to put their opinions. This enhanced open communication and allows students to speak without hesitation and confidently in class as also presented by Crisianita, and Mandasari (2022). Discussions provided students with a chance to explore the layers of possibility individuals bring to each reading, including unique experiences in their lives and differing perspectives depending upon the text that they read this aligns with the ideas presented by Wiggins (2023). Small-group, peer-led literature discussion groups can accomplish a range of goals. Peer-led literature discussions can contribute significantly to students' knowledge and appreciation of literature, facility with group processes, reading engagement, and motivation to read (Berne & Clark, 2008). Through literary discussions, students have the chance to create their own interpretations, examine their initial understandings, pose questions, and develop as critical thinkers and literate members of society. When students engage in authentic literary discussion, they go beyond surface level comprehension to active construction of understanding, students hear diverse interpretations, challenge assumptions and refine their own thinking. Carter et.al. (2024) explores that educators have employed literary discussions to engage students in critical thinking, develop analytical skills, and foster a deeper understanding of complex texts. As a researcher I have also noticed that critical ability of the students was enhanced by engaging them in various discussion activities.

Benefits of Discussion-based Learning

Discussion-based learning benefits teachers and learners in many different ways. Literary discussions are widely utilized in education, yet their profound impact on students' comprehension requires in-depth exploration (Carter et al., 2024). We can discuss the following advantages that the discussion-based activities enhance among the participants.

Enhance Critical Thinking

Discussion plays an important role in developing their critical thinking skills as it enhances their ability to be more critical and more creative (Shaber et al., 2025). When they are engaged in the process of sharing their knowledge and ideas, they explore more areas under the study. Students analyze evidence evaluate arguments and synthesize perspectives during the discussion with the group in which they are engaged in (Abe & Birabil, 2022). In relation to the story Mr. Know All the following discussion questions were used to enhance their critical thinking abilities:

- 1 Why does the narrator dislike Mr. Kelada from the beginning?
- 2 What assumptions does the narrator make and are they justified?
- 3 Discuss the story from Mr. Kelada's perspective instead of the narrators.

The teacher engaged the learners in many of these activities and learners' discussion was monitored, and the teacher provided scaffolding during the discussion with the learners.

Deeper Textual Understanding

Discussion also develops students' deeper textual understanding, in the process of discussion students do not only remain passive listeners or readers, but rather they move beyond it (Murphy et al., 2018). In fact, they become actively engaged in the process of discussion. At the same time through discussion the learners compare their perspectives which helps them see how genre conventions shape meaning. Similarly, discussion often connects to historical, cultural or social contexts which show how genres reflect and respond to broader issues and the learners move beyond the meaning and their skills are enhanced (Rokhayati, & Alvionita, 2022). At the same time the social interaction motivates the participation and creates investment in learning.

When students were involved in the discussion activities, I noticed that they were engaged in completion of the task and at the same time their textual understanding has widened. The learners enjoyed the discussion.

Increased Engagement

Discussion-based learning increases student engagement because it makes learning active rather than passive (Sahito et.al., 2025). When students take part in discussions, they feel involved and responsible for the learning process. Social interaction encourages students to share ideas, ask questions, and listen to different viewpoints (Li, 2025). This participation builds interest and keeps attention focused on the topic. Students become more motivated because they feel their opinions matter and their contribution is valued. It also creates a sense of teamwork and belonging in the class. As learners interact, they develop confidence and curiosity, which further improves their involvement and investment in learning.

During my observation of the class I have noticed that the learners really get engaged in the discussion when they were provided with the guiding questions and are asked to engage their discussion around the questions that they were provided.

Communication Skills

Students practice generating ideas, active listening and respectful discourse. When the learners are involved in the discussion activities, they are more likely to speak and this way their communication skills are enhanced. The learners get repeated, authentic opportunities to practice the core micro skill of communication. It also enhances their active listening, turn taking, clear verbal expression. At the same time learners also build their skills to negotiate the meaning. The study also found that students feel strongly about conducting class discussions face-to-face because of they felt "a more engaged, and received more immediate feedback, than in online discussion." (Eklund & Isotalus, 2024). Discussion fosters peer connection which brings a supportive learning environment. It can be inferred that the learners' interpersonal relationships enabled them to create scaffolding techniques which helps them to develop their negotiation and meaning making skills (González Reséndez, 2024).

As the learners are engaged in the discussion activities, they performed their tasks and as a monitor when I observed them very engaged and attempting to answer the questions they have been asking to each other. Learners were not very competent in communication skills however they were continuously attempting to interact in English and were found very engaging and concentrated in the task and in long run their fear keep reducing and the confidence level increased.

Foundations of Effective Literary Discussion

Teachers have to make sure of the basics that are required before engaging students in any of the discussion activities. The following are the foundations of effective literary discussion activities:

Create Inclusive Environments

Discussion gets effective and achieves its aims when the teachers can ensure that their participation in the activities is an integral part of the reading and learning (Xu et al., 2024). Every Student must feel safe to share ideas without fear of losing face among their fellow friends. This requires explicit norms for discussion, modelling respectful disagreement and ensuring diverse voices are heard and valued. The teachers have to create such an environment in the class that they feel free to put their ideas and there is no harm or lose of the image in any conditions. The classroom environment plays an important role, the culture must be set in such a way that every student feels very relaxed and non-hesitant in putting their views.

Establish Clear Purposes

Students need to understand why they are discussing and what they should achieve. Clear purposes focus thinking and prevent aimless conversation, whether analyzing a character's motivation or exploring the development of a theme.

Balance Guidance and Autonomy

Effective discussion facilitators know when to guide and when to step back. Too much control stifles authentic exploration, too little leads to superficial conversation. Skilled teachers use strategic questions, paraphrase to clarify, synthesize emerging themes, and know when to let the conversation follow expected directions that yield rich literary insights.

Essential Discussion Norms

In discussion, participants need to listen actively to understand other's viewpoints rather than only preparing a response. Discussions foster meaningful academic exchange. The teacher should build on students' ideas, acknowledge their contributions and give appropriate credit. This enhances collaborate interpretations among the participants. During the discussion it is important to respect diverse interpretations and perspectives. Literary text often allows multiple valid readings. Interpretations should be supported with clear textual evidence to maintain academic accuracy and reliability. If there appear any confusion it is no harm in asking clarifying questions which helps them in deepen understanding and prevents misinterpretation. Throughout the discussion, participants should remain focused on the literary text and the central topic making sure that question and comment support directly to a coherent and scholarly analysis.

Discussion Questions for Effective Activities for Teaching *Mr. Know All*

The following activities were adopted to make the learners comprehend the story.

Activity 1: Pre- Discussion on Judging by Appearance

Before teaching the story, the teacher sat the discussion, which built the grounds for setting the scene. This was done in the following steps.

Step 1: Write on board " Do we judge people by their appearance?"

Step 2: Let the students think for 2-3 minutes and recall real-life examples.

Step 3: Motivate them to share their answers in the group. Assure them that there is no wrong answer.

Step 4: Appreciate their answers and motivate them to share.

Activity 2: Discussion on the Character

The story contains characters like Mr. Kelada, the narrator, Mr. Ramsay, and Mrs. Ramsay. I employed the following strategies.

I asked students to choose any one of the characters and guided their discussion around one of the characters. For developing the idea, this is an example with the character Mr. Kelada.

Step 1: Teacher asked them to think and describe Mr. Kelada?

Step 2: Divided students into small groups and asked to list qualities (both positive and negative) of Mr. Kelada.

Step 3: Asked each group to highlight one quality with a line or situation from the text.

Step 4: Asked them to share and enlist all the qualities of Mr. Kelada on the board, and the teacher gave further input.

This activity helped learners develop their speaking, analytical, presentation skills with the class, along with their comprehension.

Activity 3: The Necklace Scene

This discussion was based on the particular event of the story in which the story moves around the discussion about the necklace Mrs. Ramsay is wearing. Discussion moves around the originality of the necklace. This discussion activity developed analytical and interpretive communication by encouraging students to explain reasons and results.

Step 1: The teacher narrated the scene from the story that took place around the discussion of the necklace in the story.

Step 2: asked students simple guided questions, such as :

Why did Mr. Kelada change his opinion?

What risk did he take?

Step 3: The teacher asked students to prepare short explanations in a group

Step 4: The teacher asked each group to present their answers to the whole class and provided support and suggested the modification in their presentation.

Activity 4: Message of the Story

This activity encouraged meaningful communication and motivates students to express opinions using moral and emotional language.

Step 1: The teacher allocated the students into group of four in the class.

Step 2: The teacher wrote the key words on the board: tolerance, sacrifice, prejudice

Step 3: The teacher assigned or let the group choose one word from the list.

Step 4: The teacher asked each group to discuss how the story taught these values, bringing the examples from the reading

Step 5: The teacher asked students to relate the theme to real-life situations and share their thought to the class.

These discussion activities that I have used with my class can be used to teach other literary text

by making some variations as per the requirement of the course content and the matter of the reading text. Modifications can be made through various activities in the class. The teachers can choose and implement various discussion activities around the scenes of the literary text that they are using in the class.

Questioning

Questioning students around the text plays an important strategy for developing comprehension in learners (Blything et al., 2020). There are many different types of questions that help learners with the ideas on developing the comprehensions' ability of the learners. Teachers have frequently used questions as a teaching method to evaluate students' knowledge, advance comprehension, and enhance critical thinking (Tofade et al., 2013). Well-written questions ignite conversation, provide genuine perspectives, and encourage a thorough investigation of the subject matter (Obidovna, 2023). Questions are frequently used to improve comprehension, encourage the recollection of previous knowledge and develop critical thinking abilities (Indriyana & Kuswando, 2019). Teachers use questions to help students discover what they have learned. Through questioning the teachers can thoroughly investigate the materials and stimulate conversation and peer to peer contact (Jiang, 2020). When questions are used with learners, it is believed that students are actively engaged in thinking and reflection, learning opportunities are maximized. Many types of questions can be used to develop various skills and aspects among the learners while teaching literature. The following types of questions were used during my dealing with the text I have taught.

Literal Comprehension Questions

Literal comprehension questions are directed towards increasing the comprehension of the questions. These questions establish a basic understanding of plot, characters, and textual details. They serve as the foundation for deeper analysis and ensure all students have grasped essential information before moving to interpretation (Ballesteros & Barco, 2021). Literature can improve reading comprehension to a great extent, because reading proficiency rests on the interaction between reader and writer, interaction mediated by the text (Agustín Llach, 2007). Following literal comprehension questions were devised and used during teaching of the story *Mr. Know All*.

- 1 What city was the ship sailing from, and what city was it sailing to?
- 2 How much money did Mr. Ramsay bet Mr. Kelada?
- 3 How much money was found under Mr. Kelada's door the next morning?

Analytical Questions

Analytical questions are those that require breaking down information into parts, examining relationships, and drawing logical conclusions. They go beyond simple recall to ask how or why something works, what it means, or what the implications are. These questions prompt students to examine how literary elements function and interact. Students analyze the author's craft, literary devices, character development, and thematic elements, moving beyond surface-level comprehension. The following questions were used during the classroom activities.

- 1 How did the narrator's initial feelings about Mr. Kelada create a biased view of him throughout the story?
- 2 What does the final exchange, where Mr. Kelada suggests Mr. Ramsay should pay more

attention to his wife, imply about the true cause of the pearl secret?

- 3 Why did the narrator suspect Mr. Kelada was not truly English, despite Kelada's strong claims?

Evaluative Questions

These questions ask students to make judgments about the text based on evidence and criteria. Through evaluative questions, the learners' judgment skills can be developed. Students assess characters' choices, evaluate the author's effectiveness, and consider the work's significance. Following evaluative questions were used for the text were used:

- 1 Do you think the passengers were justified in calling Mr. Kelada "the best hated man in the ship" because of his talkative and intrusive nature?
- 2 Was Mrs. Ramsay doing the right thing by secretly return the \$100 to protect a near-stranger (Mrs. Ramsay)?
- 3 Was it honorable or foolish for Mr. Kelada to sacrifice his reputation and \$100 to Mr. Kelada?

Think, Pair and Share (TPS)

Think-pair-share is a collaborative learning strategy where students work together to solve a problem or answer a question about an assigned reading (Valle et al., 2022). TPS involves three phases: students think about a prompt independently, pair with a peer to compare notes and discuss solutions, and then share their chosen ideas with the class (Hernando et al., 2023).

There are many advantages to using Think-Pair-Share with students in literary studies. It gives students to reflect on the text before presenting their thoughts to the class. They may be able to construct their own interpretations and analyze the material more thoroughly. Students are encouraged to work together with peers through TPS. They can improve their communication abilities and learn from each other's opinions. Next, TPS can increase students' interest in literature studies. This helps them in maintaining their motivation and interest by allowing them to discuss the material with their peers.

Think-Pair-Share activities reduce the anxiety and cognitive load of speaking in front of the entire class. Students process ideas individually first, then rehearse their thinking with one partner before facing the larger group. This structured progression builds confidence and dramatically increases participation. Researches have shown that TPS significantly enhances students' learning in literary lessons. Students who employed TPS were more likely to recall a story's specifics and be able to responded to questions about it (Smith, 2021). TPS can assist students in developing their critical thinking abilities (Ledlow, 2020). This activity gets complete in the following three stages:

Stage 1: Think

During this stage, each student is given a prompt or question to think about independently. They are given time to reflect on the issue and generate original ideas. Students process the question independently for 30-60 seconds (Hernando et al., 2023). They might write notes, underline text evidence, or organize their thoughts mentally.

Stage 2: Pair

Students are required to work in pairs, compare written or mental notes, and choose the ones they believe to be the most compelling or imaginative in order to discuss the solution each student has come up with. Students share their thinking with a partner for 2-3 minutes (Hernando, et al., 2023).

Each person should have time to speak while the other listens actively.

Stage 3: Share

The teacher will request the learners to present their ideas to the class after they have briefly conversed in pairs. Selected pairs share their ideas with the whole class for 5-10 minutes (Hernando et al., 2023). Students can summarize their partner's ideas, present jointly, or build on other pairs' contributions. Here are the various TPS activities that were designed around the story *Mr. Know All*.

Activity 1: On Prejudgment and First Impressions

Regarding this activity the following activities were designed.

Think: List three specific details about Mr. Kelada or his belongings that immediately made the narrator dislike him before they even spoke.

Pair: The teacher asked students to discuss in pairs:

Is it fair to judge someone based on their name, how large their luggage is, or the kind of toiletries they use?

Does the narrator's immediate dislike reveal more about Kelada or about the narrator?

Share: Finally, the students were asked to report to the class:

Should Mr. Kelada have tried harder to act "English" or was the narrator prejudiced him because of his dark skin and energetic gestures?

Activity 2: The Moment of Sacrifice

This second activity was designed around one of the scenes in which the character sacrificed the bet amount for protecting the wife. The following TPS activities were designed around this activity.

Think: describe exactly what Mr. Kelada saw on Mrs. Ramsay's face that made him stop talking right before he was about to prove he was right.

Pair: Discuss

Mr. Kelada was facing a choice between his \$100 and his reputation as Mr. Know all versus protecting Mrs. Ramsay. Why was it important for him to choose her safety over his pride?

Share: Evaluate the ending

The narrator did not entirely dislike Mr. Kelada after this event. What is the biggest lesson the narrator learned about judging others?

Conclusion and Implications

The incorporation of activity-based pedagogy in teaching 'Mr. Know-All' exemplifies a powerful shift toward student-centered literature instruction, where engagement is not incidental but deliberately cultivated through purposeful, interactive tasks. Traditional lecture-heavy approaches often render students' passive recipients, limiting their emotional and intellectual connection to texts rich in nuance like Maugham's exploration of prejudice, superficial judgments, and quiet heroism. By contrast, the proposed activities structured small-group discussions, scaffolded questioning across literal, analytical, and evaluative levels, and the structured Think-Pair-Share procedure empowers learners to actively construct meaning, challenge assumptions, and articulate diverse interpretations collaboratively. Classroom reflections reveal that discussion activities foster critical thinking by encouraging students to interrogate the narrator's biases, empathize with Mr. Kelada's sacrifice, and debate moral complexities, such as the tension between truth, reputation, and compassion.

Questioning strategies build a strong foundation for comprehension while progressively deepening analysis, enabling students to move beyond plot recall to evaluate character motivations and thematic implications. TPS, in particular, proves especially effective in reducing participation anxiety, validating individual ideas through peer exchange, and enriching whole-class discourse with more confident, thoughtful contributions.

Activity-based pedagogy provided multifaceted benefits: enhanced language proficiency through authentic communication; sharpened critical and creative faculties; greater motivation via social interaction and relevance to personal experiences; and the development of inclusive classroom norms that value diverse perspectives. Activity-based approaches offered a practical, adaptable framework for revitalizing literature classrooms in the time when the students are not very effective and are less engaged.

Finally, this reflective study confirms that when teachers design activities carefully combining structured support, setting clear learning goals, and creating a secure environment literary text can promote meaningful and transformative learning. Teachers are encouraged to modify and apply these activities to other literary works as well; this helps students to build lifelong interest in literature while developing 21st century skills with creative and critical thinking skills. Future studies may focus on measuring engagement quantitatively and qualitatively in measuring the impact of such activities in students' learning ability.

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