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O. Henry's Literary Techniques in 'The Ransom of Red Chief' through the Lens of New Criticism

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Abstract

This study examines O. Henry's literary techniques in his short story "The Ransom of Red Chief" using New Criticism. Using qualitative research and close reading approaches, it analyses narrative structure, character development, irony, humour, and other literary components. The research provides insights for scholars, students, and enthusiasts of O. Henry's work, enhancing appreciation and understanding of his literary heritage. The study also examines the pedagogical implications, highlighting its potential to improve language teaching by improving students' skills in literature analysis, fostering linguistic abilities, increasing cultural awareness, nurturing creativity and writing skills, and promoting motivation and engagement in language learning.

Key Words: *Literary techniques, literary components, New Criticism, Pedagogical implications.*

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Introduction. O. Henry's "The Ransom of Red Chief" is a classic of American literature, praised for its wit, sarcasm, and deft narrative. Since its publication in 1907, this short story has enthralled readers with a unique blend of tension, comedy, and astute insights about human nature. The story mostly centres on two foolish abductors named Bill and Sam who attempt to hold little Johnny Dorset, also known as "Red Chief," hostage only to become mixed up in a hilarious string of mishaps.

The literary devices used by O. Henry to create a story that goes beyond the confines of its genre are essential to the story's ongoing appeal in "The Ransom of Red Chief". O. Henry skilfully negotiates the complexities of human behaviour and societal norms through painstaking attention to detail, nuanced characterization, and a strategic use of irony. This allows readers to reflect on themes of power dynamics, the absurdity of ambition, and the unpredictable nature of human relationships.

This study aims to explore the literary techniques employed by O. Henry in this renowned short story through the lens of New Criticism, a theoretical framework that emphasizes close reading and textual analysis. Through an in-depth examination of plot structure, dialogue, symbolism, and narrative voice, this research seeks to shed light on the deft use of language and form by O. Henry to captivate readers on an intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic level.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the understanding and appreciation of O. Henry's literary techniques. By conducting a new critical

analysis, the research will shed light on the specific ways in which O. Henry's narrative structure, character development, irony, humour, and other literary components interact to create a rich and engaging story. Such insights will not only deepen the appreciation of O. Henry's work but also provide valuable knowledge to scholars, students, and enthusiasts of his literary works.

Furthermore, this study holds pedagogical implications for language teaching. Analysing literature through the lens of New Criticism can enhance students' skills in literary analysis, fostering their linguistic abilities and increasing their cultural awareness. By exploring O. Henry's techniques, educators can nurture students' creativity and writing skills, while also promoting motivation and engagement in the language learning process. Understanding the intricacies of O. Henry's techniques can serve as a valuable resource for language instructors seeking to incorporate literary analysis into their curriculum.

From a theoretical vantage point, certain researchers tackle the analysis of literary techniques and discuss how writers use them to convey meaning and emotion to readers (Culler, 1975; Pelias, 2005; Scholes, 2006; Toolan, 2008). The majority of the aforementioned researchers concentrate on how to explore the various ways literature can be studied and the different types of techniques that can be used to analyze different genres and works of literature. They aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the intricate relationship between literary

techniques and the overall impact they have on readers. Researchers look at the many strategies and techniques writers use in an effort to identify the fundamental processes that underlie the potency of literary works.

According to Scholes (2006), "narrative means all those literary works that are distinguished by two characteristics: the presence of a story and a storyteller (p. 4). Thus, every literary device a writer employs to express meaning is a precise, purposeful composition of words. When a writer employs a literary device, it is typically in reference to a single word, phrase, or specific combination of words or phrases at one point in the text. Metaphors, similes, alliteration, personification, and many other literary elements can be used in writing. By employing these techniques, writers may produce a story that is more vivid and captivating and connects with readers on a deeper level. These devices not only improve the narrative experience but also enable a more nuanced examination of difficult subjects and concepts.

Lakoff and Johnson (2003, as cited in Yunfei Peng, 2023) wrote, "The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another." In "To Kill a Mockingbird," Harper Lee (1960) uses the metaphor of the mockingbird to symbolize innocence and the destructive nature of prejudice. This gives the story depth and increases readers' empathy, which increases their emotional investment in the story. Similarly, irony may arouse curiosity and tension by presenting situations that contradict expectations. In "The Great Gatsby," F. Scott

Fitzgerald (1925) uses dramatic irony to reveal the tragic downfall of the protagonist, Gatsby, and to comment on the corrupt nature of the American Dream.

In George Orwell's (1949) "Nineteen Eighty Four," Big Brother is a symbol of the authoritarian and repressive government that emphasizes the loss of personal freedom and inspires terror, as cited in Sabir Mirgani Ali et al.'s (2022) article "Clarifying the Concept of Big Brother as Depicted by George Orwell's Novel Nineteen Eighty Four." Throughout the course of the novel, Orwell used this image to powerfully illustrate the dehumanizing consequences of living in a dystopian society. Allegory may also be used to make statements about social injustices and current events. In William Golding's (1963) "Lord of the Flies," the island is used as a metaphor for people and their innate tendency toward violence. With the use of such a device, the author is able to examine the darkest side of humanity and question accepted ideas about civilization and morality. Academics and experts have conducted extensive research to explore the value and impact of literary techniques. For example, in a study published in the South Asian Research Journal of Arts, Language, and Literature, Abbar's (2023) analysis of symbolism in modern literature reveals that it improves reader engagement and helps readers comprehend intricate issues on a deeper level. James and Morel (2020), well-known literary critics, contend that the use of irony in literary works gives the stories additional levels of meaning and challenges readers' preconceptions, which makes them more thought-

provoking. These examples demonstrate the depth of scholarly investigations into the effects of literary techniques on readers and the overall quality of literary works. In 1974, Wayne C. Booth's "A Rhetoric of Irony" is still considered a seminal work in the study of irony, examining its rhetorical functions and literary manifestations. Satirical writing, which employs irony and biting humor to question societal norms and injustices, is best exemplified by Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal" (2019). Mikhail Bakhtin's 1986 book "Speech Genres and Other Late Essays" offers insightful explanations of how conversation influences narrative voice and the dialogic nature of language. Roland Barthes carefully examines narrative norms and linguistic patterns in "S/Z" (1970), emphasizing the role discourse plays in the formation of meaning. Accordingly, writers have access to a vast array of literary techniques, and these decisions usually establish the structure of their works, influencing not only the narrative's tone but also eliciting and strengthening the readers' emotional responses. Literary analysis helps the reader understand the depth between words and elicits the author's intended response by delving into the underlying layers of meaning.

Numerous scholars (Inge, 1980; Stuart, 1990; Freedman, 2000; Jun, 2005; Zhongying, 2007; Cai, 2018) investigate O. Henry's distinct writing style, scrutinizing the methods and concepts that characterize his literary heritage. In his works, O'Henry employed a vibrant and intricate vocabulary. He adds richness and attractiveness to his language by

employing metonymy, hyperbole, metaphor, irony, and paronomasia. He uses these literary strategies to add comedy and amusement to his work. Academics like Thomas Inge (1980) and Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV (2005) draw attention to the sarcastic and comedic aspects of O. Henry's narratives. Whereas Fisher focuses on elements of deceit and the unexpected in the narrative, Inge highlights the importance of comedy. Cai (2018) argues that "O. Henry usually uses humorous language to make the whole work vivid and, at the same time, allows readers to be guided by his language in the process of reading to make seemingly ending speculation. However, this is not the case, which makes the whole work more dramatic." (p. 1). For instance, in "Police and Hymn," Soapy committed several crimes to make it through the harsh jail winter. But in O. Henry's humorous language, the plot is that Soapy managed to escape by coincidence. Rollins (1993) said that "just as his plots and his characters are humorous in conception and in treatment, so the most striking trait of O. Henry as a stylist is humor." (p158). Rollins also said "O. Henry's piquant audacities of style" are likeable, but they are sure to lose "their piquancy and lower his rank in literature." (Ibid). O. Henry enjoyed depicting ironic situations and had a wonderful sense of humor. Some of his tales, like "The Ransom of Red Chief," are hilarious from start to finish. Others only touch on humor when discussing serious topics. Irony makes up a large portion of O. Henry's comedic writing. "Irony" is when a writer uses a term to signify something completely different from

what it actually means. An entire tale can occasionally be ironic.

The reader's expectations are totally unmet by this type of story. Thus, the unexpected and surprising endings of O'Henry's works are noteworthy features. Usually, the tale takes one direction at first, and just when the readers think they know how it will finish, it takes an unexpected turn. Even if the unexpected conclusion is depressing, it makes sense. Gao (2014) comments on the ironic ending of O. Henry (humorous irony) and asserts, "This surprising ending is always unexpected to the readers, but it is reasonable, which has triggered people's thinking about society and even life. It has also formed the unique style of O. Henry's works, became the unique European ending style of O. Henry's works, and laid the foundation for him to become a world master of short stories." (p. 2).

In the on-going research on identifying and analyzing O. Henry's writing style and techniques, Yuan (2016) emphasizes that "in O. Henry's novels, the plot of the story is mostly very smooth, and there are few direct and fierce contradictions. With the development of time, the gentle story moves step by step towards a seemingly doomed ending without any waves. However, at the end of the story, O. Henry turns his pen to a completely different ending, which surprises the readers." (p. 1). O. Henry's works are grouped together by Luedtke & Lawrence (2016) into five components. First, a succinct introduction that uses a reliable "hook" to get the reader into the action; secondly, a frank narrator who withholds crucial details until the very

end; third, a light-hearted and sage tone that incorporates wit, sarcasm, flair, philosophy, and conversation; fourth, an accepting application of the term "humane renegade"; fifth, and lastly, "surprise endings"; a good dose of coincidence, generally accompanied by a reversal in which everything is salvaged and put right. The entirety of O. Henry's writings is embodied in these six components. (p304).

According to Cai (2018), the "O. Henry ending" is exceptional not just because of its literary prowess but also because of the works' ideological relevance. It has the power to draw in a large readership, heighten the plot and philosophy of the book by the conclusion, give the entire work a distinct appeal, and provoke readers to reflect on and reframe their own lives (p. 1). The O. Henry style doesn't only shape the tapestry of the story but also reveals the human rights doctrine in criticizing and satirizing.

According to Smith (2018), a widely held belief is that "The Ransom of Red Chief" challenges conventional narrative cliches, especially those pertaining to the kidnapping subject. O. Henry presents a scenario in which the kidnappers turn out to be the victims, departing from the traditional kidnapping storyline. Rather than receiving the requested ransom, they discover that Red Chief, their youthful prisoner, has outwitted them. According to Jones (2010), O. Henry uses comedy to mock the avarice and incompetence of the kidnappers, who are eventually brought down by their own petard. The satirical conclusion, in which the kidnappers pay Red Chief's father to free him, is a biting critique of the

ridiculousness of some human actions. The relationships between Red Chief, Bill, and Sam have been examined by academics like Brown (2019), who have focused on issues of agency, resilience, and power.

However, there is a gap in research on the specific literary techniques used by O. Henry in the story. This study aims to fill this gap by examining irony, satire, humor, hyperbole, dialogue, and twist endings. By focusing on these techniques, this research seeks to reveal O. Henry's intentions and provide a deeper understanding of the story's meaning. The study also aims to uncover the nuances and subtleties of O. Henry's storytelling style, enhancing our comprehension of his literary talents. The existing literature on the story has primarily focused on broader themes and character dynamics, leaving a research gap in exploring O. Henry's specific literary techniques.

A brief literature review provide a foundation for the current study. By summarizing key insights and approaches taken by other scholars in analyzing O. Henry's literary techniques, researchers can show the evolution of scholarship in this area and highlight the gaps that this study aims to fill. This contextualization can strengthen the rationale for the study and chosen research design and contribute to the academic discourse on O. Henry's oeuvre.

This study is linked to the following research objectives as they collectively aim to deepen understanding, enhance appreciation, and explore pedagogical implications related to O. Henry's literary techniques in "The Ransom of Red Chief."

Research Objectives

This study explores O. Henry's storytelling techniques in "The Ransom of Red Chief" and their impact on the reader's experience. This research

- Examines literary devices like irony, foreshadowing, humour, characterization, narrative structure, symbolism, setting, dialogue, plot twists, theme, narrator's voice, suspense, and tension.
- Analyse how these devices contribute to the story's entertainment value, thematic depth, and reader impact.
- Explores the pedagogical implications of analysing literary techniques in language teaching, focusing on enhancing students' literature analysis skills, fostering linguistic abilities, and increasing cultural awareness, nurturing creativity, and promoting motivation in language learning.

Theoretical framework

New Criticism, a significant school of literary theory and interpretation, emerged in the early 20th century, primarily in the United States. This approach, also known as formalism or formalist criticism, revolutionized literary studies by focusing on close reading and textual analysis. New Critics emphasized examining the text's intrinsic qualities—its language, structure, and formal elements—rather than external contexts like history, biography, or socio-political influences. Key principles include close reading, textual integrity, rejection of authorial intent (intentional fallacy), separation of emotional response from meaning

(affective fallacy), and appreciation of ambiguity and paradox.

Using the theoretical framework of New Criticism, this study aims to analyze O. Henry's literary techniques in "The Ransom of Red Chief" through close reading and textual analysis. By focusing on the story's internal structure and elements, the study seeks to uncover how O. Henry's techniques contribute to the overall impact and meaning of the narrative.

Rationale

The New Criticism Theory is valuable for analyzing short stories as it focuses on close reading, disregarding external factors like authorial intent or historical context. It examines language, imagery, symbolism, and structure within the text, seeking patterns and themes. The theory emphasizes meticulous analysis of every word to understand the author's precise language choices and their impact. Formal elements such as plot, characterization, setting, and point of view are also explored to comprehend the story's structure and thematic development. New Criticism values ambiguity and paradox, encourages unity and coherence, and aligns with formalist criticism, examining the interplay of form and content. Applying New Criticism Theory to short story analysis allows for a deep exploration of the text's complexities and interpretation.

Significance of the Study

This study utilizes the theoretical framework of New Criticism to analyze O. Henry's storytelling techniques in "The Ransom of Red Chief." Through close reading, textual analysis, and an examination of form and structure, the study aims to understand how O.

Henry's techniques contribute to the story's impact and meaning. It investigates narrative elements, such as characterization, plot structure, dialogue, and narrative structure, to uncover the use of irony, foreshadowing, humor, symbolism, and other literary devices that enhance the story's entertainment value and thematic depth. This analysis within the New Criticism framework provides insights for language teaching, fostering skills in analyzing literature, enhancing linguistic abilities, increasing cultural awareness, nurturing creativity and writing skills, and promoting motivation and engagement in language learning.

Research Questions

The following main research questions are designed to directly address the research objectives and guide the analysis of O. Henry's use of literary techniques to understand their impact on reader experience and story effectiveness. It also seeks to uncover patterns and themes within the story.

1. How does O. Henry's use of various literary devices—such as irony, foreshadowing, humour, characterization, narrative structure, symbolism, setting, dialogue, plot structure, plot twists, theme, narrator's voice, suspense, and tension—in "The Ransom of Red Chief" enhance the story's entertainment value, thematic depth, and overall impact on the reader, and what are the pedagogical implications of analyzing these techniques for enhancing students' literary analysis skills, linguistic abilities, cultural awareness, creativity, writing skills, and motivation in the language learning process?

By investigating these questions, the study intends to provide a comprehensive understanding of O. Henry's techniques, their contribution to the story, and their potential benefits in language teaching classroom.

Research Methodology

By investigating the research questions outlined above, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of O. Henry's storytelling techniques, their contribution to the story, and their potential benefits in language teaching classrooms. To achieve this, the study employs qualitative and literary analytic methodologies.

Data Collection

This study employs a combination of primary and secondary data collection methods to analyse O. Henry's short story "The Ransom of Red Chief" and its linguistic and literary elements focusing on new criticism lens.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process involves reviewing annotated notes, examining narrative elements, plot structure, dialogue, themes, and literary techniques like irony, deception, and childhood innocence. The researcher will also refer to existing literature to enrich interpretation.

Analysis and findings

Analyzing the story text through the lens of New Criticism and linguistics, this study examines the use of language, the narrator's perspective, and the narrative structure to uncover deeper meanings and explore the author's intentions.

Progression of events

The following lines demonstrate the progression of events in a linear

manner, starting with the introduction of the kidnapping plan, followed by the rising tension, climax, falling action, and ultimately, the resolution. The linear narrative structure effectively builds tension and suspense as readers anticipate the outcome of the story, culminating in an unexpected and satisfying resolution.

Introduction: "*It looked like a good thing: but wait till I tell you.*" - This line serves as the opening of the story, introducing the readers to the narrator's perspective and setting up the anticipation for an intriguing tale.

Rising Action: "*We kidnapped him, at the time. And we've got him now, in a cave, thirty miles southeast of Summit.*" - This line marks the rising action, where the kidnapping plan is set in motion, and the readers are introduced to the conflict and the kidnappers' initial belief that they have control over the situation.

Climax: "*He put on a pair of derringers, a belt with a row of cartridges, and two formidable knives in his belt.*" - This line represents the climax, where Red Chief, the kidnapped boy, asserts his dominance over the kidnappers by arming himself, escalating the tension and challenging their assumed control.

Falling Action: "*Red Chief was sitting on Bill's chest, with one hand twined in Bill's hair.*" - This line marks the falling action, as the kidnappers find themselves physically overpowered and subjected to Red Chief's torment, intensifying the chaos and highlighting their diminishing control.

"We are weary and pale with watching and worry, and the staging of this play has become a solemn and

earnest business to us." - This line signifies the resolution, where the kidnappers, exhausted and defeated, decide to release Red Chief and pay his father to take him back. This unexpected resolution brings the story to a close, concluding the linear narrative structure.

Language use

The following lines demonstrate O. Henry's mastery of concise and precise language, his ability to provide vivid descriptions, and his use of colloquial language and dialect to enhance the authenticity of the characters' voices and create a realistic setting.

"It looked like a good thing: but wait till I tell you." - This line demonstrates O. Henry's concise language, capturing the reader's attention with a brief and intriguing statement.

"We kidnapped him, at the time. And we've got him now, in a cave, thirty miles southeast of Summit." - This line showcases O. Henry's precise language, providing clear and specific details about the kidnapping and the current location of the characters.

"He had on a four-dollar summer hotel shirt and a ten-dollar white duck suit, and he wore a boy's cap advertising a flambeau procession in honor of Our Candidate." - This line exhibits O. Henry's use of vivid descriptions, painting a clear picture of Red Chief's attire and emphasizing his privileged background.

"He proceeded to take a large red apple out of his pocket, such as housewives bring out of Sunday-school in their larger reticules." - This line establishes O. Henry's use of colloquial language, employing a

comparison to housewives and Sunday-school to create a relatable and authentic tone.

"Well, the kid was a holy terror when it comes to physical exercise, and noise." - This line shows O. Henry's use of dialect, portraying the characters' speech patterns and enhancing the authenticity of their voices.

"The principal street in Summit we calculated to be as safe as a money vault." - This line illustrates O. Henry's use of language to create a realistic setting, comparing the safety of the street to a money vault and emphasizing the characters' perception.

"He had on a four-dollar summer hotel shirt and a ten-dollar white duck suit, and he wore a boy's cap advertising a flambeau procession in honor of Our Candidate." - This line provides a vivid description of Red Chief's attire, highlighting his expensive shirt and suit, as well as the cap promoting a flambeau procession. The details paint a clear picture of his clothing and suggest a privileged background.

"He looked like a mixture of an innocent angel and a tough clean-faced kid." - This line combines contrasting images to create a vivid description of Red Chief's appearance. It evokes the innocence of an angel while also hinting at his mischievous and rebellious nature.

"He had a towhead that was a figure of speech in every town we kidnapped a kid in." - This line uses vivid language to describe Red Chief's hair color. The phrase "towhead" vividly portrays his light-colored hair, emphasizing its prominence and making it a memorable characteristic.

"His shoes were a mile off, but he had a pair of patent-leather boots on his feet." - This line employs vivid language to describe Red Chief's mismatched shoes. It creates a humorous image of his shoes being far too big for him while highlighting the contrasting elegance of his patent-leather boots.

"He peeled the remaining skin with his knife and swallowed it whole and then I handed him the last one, and he dashed it into a cavity in the rocks." - This line uses vivid language to describe Red Chief's actions, specifically his intense consumption of an apple and his forceful disposal of the core into a cavity. The description emphasizes his wild and unrefined behaviour.

Colloquial language

The following lines demonstrate O. Henry's use of colloquial language throughout the story. By incorporating informal expressions, contractions, and relatable comparisons, he creates a conversational and down-to-earth atmosphere, allowing readers to connect with the characters and their dialogue in a familiar and accessible way.

"It looked like a good thing: but wait till I tell you." - This line uses informal language, with the phrase "wait till I tell you" reflecting a conversational and colloquial tone.

"You bring Johnny home and pay me two hundred and fifty dollars in cash, and I agree to take him off your hands." - This line employs direct and straightforward language, reflecting a colloquial style of communication.

"Well, we've kidnapped him, at the time. And we've got him now, in a cave, thirty miles southeast of

Summit." - This line uses the contraction "we've" and the phrase "at the time" to convey a sense of informality and colloquial speech.

"Well, the kid was a holy terror when it comes to physical exercise, and noise." - This line features the colloquial phrase "holy terror" to describe Red Chief's unruly behavior.

"He proceeded to take a large red apple out of his pocket, such as housewives bring out of Sunday-school in their larger reticules." - This line, as mentioned, employs a colloquial comparison to housewives and Sunday-school to create a relatable and authentic tone.

The following lines exemplify O. Henry's use of dialect to represent the speech patterns and regional variations of the characters. By incorporating specific word choices and grammatical structures, the dialect adds depth and authenticity to the characters' voices, enriching the storytelling experience.

"Well, the kid was a holy terror when it comes to physical exercise, and noise." - This line, as mentioned, showcases the use of dialect, particularly through the phrase "when it comes to" instead of "when it came to." This reflects the characters' speech patterns and adds authenticity to their voices.

"I don't believe he ever heard of George Washington, or Ben Franklin, or Thomas Jefferson." - This line features the use of "I don't believe" instead of "I don't think" and "or" instead of "nor," representing the characters' dialect.

"He's got a bank account, and his father's name is worth five millions!" - This line includes the use of "He's got"

instead of "He has" and "worth five millions" instead of "worth five million dollars," demonstrating dialect in the characters' speech.

"You may have kidnapped me for a ransom, but you can't blackmail me into using a toothbrush." - This line showcases the use of "may have" instead of "might have" and "into using" instead of "to use," reflecting the dialect in the characters' speech.

"He's a nice little chap, but he bangs things around." - This line features the use of "chap" instead of "boy" and the phrase "bangs things around" to describe Red Chief's energetic and noisy behavior. The colloquial language and word choice reflect the characters' dialect.

"The fun of camping out appealed to the kid's imagination." - The use of "kid" instead of "child" and the phrase "appealed to the kid's imagination" reflect the characters' dialect and regional speech patterns.

"We're playing a game of Indian, but it's getting a little too real to be healthy." - The use of "we're" instead of "we are" and the phrase "getting a little too real" reflect the characters' dialect and conversational tone.

"I think you're a little high-minded." - The use of "I think" instead of "I reckon" and the phrase "a little high-minded" reflect the characters' dialect and informal speech patterns.

O. Henry's attention to detail in creating a realistic setting is evident through specific locations, descriptions of the town's layout and population, and visual details of the buildings. These elements immerse the reader in a tangible and believable environment, adding depth to the narrative and

grounding the events within a recognizable and relatable context.

"We selected for our operations the residence of Elder Ebenezer Dorset." - This line establishes the setting by mentioning the specific location, the residence of Elder Ebenezer Dorset.

"Summit was the name of the town." - This line provides the name of the town where the story takes place, further grounding the setting.

"The principal street in Summit we calculated to be as safe as a money vault." - This line, as mentioned, illustrates O. Henry's use of language to create a realistic setting. It emphasizes the characters' perception of the street's safety by comparing it to a money vault, suggesting that it is highly secure.

"The main street was four blocks long, and the town consisted of three hundred inhabitants, who dispensed their own justice through a mayor and a city marshal." - This line offers further details about the town's setting, describing the length of the main street, the size of the population, and the presence of local authorities.

"The house was a two-story, frame building, painted white, with green shutters and a lawn in front." - This line provides a description of the exterior of Elder Dorset's house, adding visual details to enhance the reader's visualization of the setting.

In "The Ransom of Red Chief," O. Henry goes beyond simple descriptions to establish a realistic setting. There are other additional elements that contribute to the realistic portrayal of the story's setting:

Regional References: O. Henry includes references to specific locations and landmarks that give a sense of

place. **For example**, he mentions the town of Summit and describes the surrounding area as "wild mountain country." These references anchor the story in a specific geographical region.

Economic Activities: The story incorporates realistic details about the town's economic activities. It mentions that Summit's inhabitants were engaged in farming, cattle raising, and mining silver in the nearby hills. These references add depth to the setting by suggesting the primary industries and livelihoods of the townspeople.

Social Structure: O. Henry's mention of a mayor and a city marshal in his writings provides glimpses into the social structure of the town, reflecting its hierarchical organization and established order. The following examples add realism by indicating the presence of local governance and authority within the community.

"The town consisted of three hundred inhabitants, who dispensed their own justice through a mayor and a city marshal." - In this line explicitly mentions the presence of a mayor and a city marshal, indicating the existence of a system of local governance within the town.

"The mayor of the town, knowing that such efficiency in extortion would be worth a hundred times the fifty dollars demanded, acceded to the terms, and the two children were given into the custody of Bill and me." - The mayor's involvement in the negotiation and decision-making process, suggesting their authority and role in town affairs are mentioned clearly in this line.

"The mayor of Summit was a suitably grave and impressive

personage, elected to the position by virtue of his exemplary character and weighty opinions." - This line emphasizes the importance and stature of the mayor within the social structure of the town, highlighting their respected position.

Physical Descriptions: O. Henry's descriptions of the town and its surroundings contribute to the realistic setting. He mentions the main street, the length of the town, and the appearance of the houses, such as a two-story frame building with white paint and green shutters. These specific details paint a vivid picture of the physical environment, allowing readers to imagine the setting more fully.

"The main street was four blocks long, and the town consisted of three hundred inhabitants, who dispensed their own justice through a mayor and a city marshal." - This line provides a description of the main street's length, offering a sense of the town's size and layout.

"The house was a two-story, frame building, painted white, with green shutters and a lawn in front." - This line describes the appearance of Elder Dorset's house, highlighting specific details such as the two-story frame structure, white paint, green shutters, and the presence of a lawn in front.

"Summit is thirty miles from the cave." - This line mentions the distance between Summit and the cave, providing a geographical reference that helps to situate the story's physical surroundings.

"Around the town lay big tracts of timber, ready to be logged." - This line mentions the presence of timber tracts surrounding the town, giving insights



into the natural environment and potential economic activities in the area.

"It was a nice quiet burg, and had a good town-spirit." - This line describes the town as a quiet and peaceful place, and mentions its positive town spirit, creating a sense of the overall atmosphere and character of the community.

Cultural References: The characters' interactions and conversations also contribute to the realism of the setting. They discuss local events, such as a flambeau procession in honor of a political candidate, which reflects the town's cultural and political context. These references help to establish a sense of community and societal norms within the setting.

The following lines illustrate O. Henry's inclusion of cultural references that contribute to the realism of the setting. The mention of the railroad, the involvement of the mayor in negotiations, the flambeau procession, and the practice of organizing searching parties all provide insights into the town's cultural and political context. These references help establish a sense of community, societal norms, and the shared experiences of the townspeople, enhancing the authenticity and depth of the setting.

"There had been no prisoners in the jail since the railroad was built." - This line indirectly references the construction of the railroad, which is a significant event in the town's history and reflects the changing times and development of infrastructure.

"The mayor of the town, knowing that such efficiency in extortion would be worth a hundred times the fifty dollars demanded, acceded to

the terms." - This line mentions the mayor's involvement in the negotiation process, highlighting the role and authority of local government in the town's cultural and legal affairs.

"There had been a flambeau procession in town that night in honor of the political candidate." - This line refers to a flambeau procession, a cultural event held in honor of a political candidate. This reference sheds light on the town's political activity and the community's engagement in civic events.

"We'll organize a searching party and scour the country for fifty miles around." - This line suggests the practice of organizing searching parties, indicating a cultural norm within the town during times of crisis or need.

By incorporating these elements, O. Henry creates a multi-dimensional and realistic setting for the story. The combination of specific locations, economic activities, social structure, physical descriptions, and cultural references paints a rich and immersive picture of the town and its surroundings. This attention to detail enhances the reader's engagement with the story and contributes to its overall believability.

This analysis revolves around the formal aspects of the story, such as structure, language, imagery, and symbolism. O. Henry masterfully employs various literary devices and elements in "The Ransom of Red Chief," including irony, foreshadowing, humour, characterization, narrative structure, symbolism, setting, dialogue, plot structure, plot twists, theme, narrator's voice, suspense, and tension. Each of these elements contributes to

the overall storytelling in the following ways:

Irony: Irony is a prominent device in the story, where unexpected and humorous situations arise. The following lines exemplify the ironic situations in the story, where the kidnappers' expectations are subverted by the mischievous and uncontrollable nature of Red Chief, resulting in humorous and unexpected outcomes.

"We had forgotten the wild habits of this cub, and were struck dumb with horror" - This line showcases the irony that the kidnappers, who believed they had control over the situation, are now horrified by Red Chief's wild behavior.

"Red Chief was sitting on Bill's chest, with one hand twined in Bill's hair" - This line depicts the ironic reversal of power, as Red Chief, the supposed victim, is now the one asserting dominance over Bill.

"Red Chief was delighted with the game, and insisted on being the Black Scout" - This line emphasizes the irony that Red Chief finds joy and entertainment in tormenting his captors rather than feeling afraid or victimized.

"I think you are a little high, Bill" - This line is ironic as it suggests that Bill, who initially thought he had devised a fool proof plan, is now being mocked and underestimated by his own accomplice.

"Red Chief was awakened by the cold water and began to make a villainous outcry" - This line highlights the irony that the kidnappers' attempt to use water to control Red Chief ends up backfiring, causing him to become even more unruly and disruptive.

Foreshadowing: Foreshadowing is employed to hint at the upcoming events, creating anticipation and suspense. The subsequent lines subtly foreshadow the disruptive and unpredictable nature of Red Chief, creating anticipation and suspense for the readers as they anticipate the unfolding events and the challenges the kidnappers will face.

"He is a boy of ten, with hair the color of the Red Chief's" - This line foreshadows the significance of Red Chief's fiery and mischievous nature, as indicated by his hair color.

"He wriggled and squirmed and said he would skin his aunt" - This line hints at Red Chief's unruly behavior and tendency to cause trouble, foreshadowing the chaos he will bring to the kidnappers' lives.

"He put on a pair of derringers, a belt with a row of cartridges, and two formidable knives in his belt" - This line foreshadows Red Chief's aggressive and fearless nature, suggesting that he will not be easily subdued by the kidnappers.

"He proceeded to take a large red apple out of his pocket, such as housewives bring out of Sunday-school in their larger reticules" - This line foreshadows Red Chief's resourcefulness and ability to surprise the kidnappers with unexpected items or actions.

"He had on a four-dollar summer hotel shirt and a ten-dollar white duck suit, and he wore a boy's cap advertising a flambeau procession in honour of Our Candidate" - This line hints at Red Chief's privileged background and suggests that he may

have a mischievous and rebellious streak.

Humour

The following lines illustrate how O. Henry uses humour in "The Ransom of Red Chief" through witty dialogue, exaggerated characterizations, and absurd situations, which collectively lighten the tone and engage the reader in the comedic aspects of the story.

"Bill was the hermit, and I was the goat." : This line introduces the absurd roles Bill and Sam take on during their failed kidnapping attempt. Describing Bill as a hermit and himself as a goat humorously sets the stage for the comically inept nature of their characters.

"I never was more disgusted in my life. I took him by the neck and shook him till his freckles rattled." : This line showcases the narrator's frustration with Red Chief's mischievous behavior. The exaggeration of shaking him until his freckles rattled adds a humorous and exaggerated visual image, highlighting the absurdity of trying to control Red Chief.

"He seems to be having the time of his life.": This line is used by the narrator to comment on Red Chief's enjoyment of the situation, despite being kidnapped. It contrasts with the kidnappers' expectations of him being scared or submissive, adding a humorous element as Red Chief turns the tables on them with his adventurous spirit.

"All this while Bill was roaring and jumping around the cabin, getting ready to skin me.": This line describes Bill's exaggerated reaction to Red Chief's antics. The image of Bill roaring and jumping around in frustration over

the chaos caused by Red Chief's behavior adds to the comedic tension of the situation.

"He was one of those country-fellows who are perfectly delighted to be run over by a cyclone if they can find a stout tree to hang on to." : This simile humorously describes Red Chief's resilience and wild nature. It portrays him as someone who thrives in chaotic situations, contrasting sharply with the kidnappers' attempts to control him and adding to the humor of the story.

Characterization

The following lines emphasize the characterization of Red Chief as well as the contrast with the kidnappers, Bill and Sam:

"He was a boy of ten, with bas-relief freckles, and hair the color of the cover of the magazine you buy at the news-stand when you want to catch a train." : This description of Red Chief emphasizes his young age and physical features, such as his freckles and vibrant hair color, setting the stage for his lively and spirited personality.

"The kid was in the street, throwing rocks at a kitten on the opposite fence.": This action by Red Chief highlights his mischievous and playful nature. His choice to throw rocks at a kitten demonstrates his enjoyment of causing trouble and his disregard for rules or consequences.

"He put a caterpillar down my back, and I asked him to not do it anymore." : Red Chief's prank of putting a caterpillar down the narrator's back shows his penchant for mischief and his fearless nature in teasing others, even his captors.

"But he got so interested watching Bill and me and wondering what we

was going to do with him that he forgot all about his parents. : This line illustrates Red Chief's curiosity and intelligence. Despite being kidnapped, he focuses on observing and analysing Bill and Sam's actions, showing his sharp wit and ability to adapt to unusual situations.

"He had Bill's neck in a twist like a sheep's, and he had a handful of hair in his right hand.": This physical altercation between Red Chief and Bill demonstrates the boy's strength and determination. His ability to physically overpower Bill adds to his characterization as a spirited and defiant child.

"He wound up by taking a piece of bark off the tree and hitting me with it, and then he begun to look for bricks to throw." : Red Chief's aggressive behaviour, such as hitting the narrator with bark and searching for bricks to throw, showcases his boldness and unpredictability, further emphasizing the challenge he poses to Bill and Sam.

"You don't know what a harum-scarum, fun-loving little rascal he is.": This line, spoken by Sam about Red Chief, encapsulates the kidnappers' growing realization of Red Chief's energetic and mischievous personality. It underscores Red Chief's ability to disrupt their plans with his playful antics.

Symbolism

In "The Ransom of Red Chief," O. Henry employs symbolism to enrich the narrative and underscore its themes.

"The town was as flat as a piece of board and planted with tall, wind-shaken cottonwoods that stood up like the first-lieutenant's sticks of a battery of light artillery." : This

description of the town where the kidnapping occurs symbolizes the mundane and predictable nature of civilization. The flatness of the town contrasts with the wild and unpredictable nature of Red Chief, foreshadowing the chaos that will ensue when he enters the kidnappers' lives.

"We were treading on the brink of a slough of despond.": This metaphorical language symbolizes the kidnappers' increasing sense of dread and despair as they realize they cannot control Red Chief. The "slough of despond" represents their sinking hopes of successfully completing the kidnapping.

"Bill's saddle-colored face was beginning to take on a purple hue, and he around at me with a face getting serious." : This description of Bill's changing facial color symbolizes his rising frustration and anger as Red Chief continues to torment him. The purple hue suggests his growing agitation and the impending eruption of his emotions.

"You've got no more expression than a terracotta warrior." : This simile used by the narrator to describe Bill symbolizes his stoic and unresponsive demeanor in the face of Red Chief's antics. It highlights Bill's helplessness and inability to effectively handle the situation, contrasting with Red Chief's vibrant and dynamic presence.

"That boy put me through a torturing night of agony." : This hyperbolic statement symbolizes the emotional and psychological toll Red Chief's relentless energy and mischief take on the kidnappers. It emphasizes the overwhelming challenge they face in trying to control him and complete their plan.

Themes

In "The Ransom of Red Chief" by O. Henry, several themes emerge through the narrative, emphasizing irony, the unpredictability of human nature, and the contrast between expectation and reality.

Irony

"All this while Bill was roaring and jumping around the cabin, getting ready to skin me.": This line reflects the ironic situation where the kidnappers, who expected an easy ransom from Red Chief's wealthy family, find themselves in a chaotic and dangerous predicament instead. The irony lies in their roles being reversed, they become the ones who are afraid and threatened by Red Chief, rather than the other way around.

Unpredictability of Human Nature

"He seems to be having the time of his life." This statement highlights Red Chief's unpredictable nature and his ability to find joy and excitement even in the midst of being kidnapped. It challenges the kidnappers' assumptions about how a child would react in such a situation, showcasing the resilience and adaptability of human behaviour in unexpected circumstances.

Contrast between Expectation and Reality

"We were treading on the brink of a slough of despond." This metaphorical expression signifies the stark contrast between the kidnappers' initial expectations of an easy ransom and the grim reality of their failed plan and the chaos caused by Red Chief. It underscores how reality can differ drastically from one's expectations, leading to unforeseen consequences and challenges.

Absurdity of Human Desires

"But he was having the time of his life." This line captures the absurdity of human desires, as Red Chief's enjoyment of the kidnapping ordeal contradicts conventional expectations. It suggests that what one desires or expects may not align with reality, highlighting the unpredictable and often irrational nature of human desires and motivations.

The above discussed themes collectively contribute to the story's depth and complexity, prompting readers to reflect on the humorous yet thought-provoking exploration of human behaviour and the consequences of actions.

Suspense and Tension

The subsequent lines from "The Ransom of Red Chief" that illustrate how O. Henry builds suspense and tension through the escalating chaos caused by Red Chief's antics, and the kidnappers' struggle to control the situation:

"He had Bill's neck in a twist like a sheep's, and he had a handful of hair in his right hand.": This line depicts a physical altercation where Red Chief has physically overwhelmed Bill, illustrating the escalating chaos and tension as the situation spirals out of control. The vivid imagery of Red Chief's grip on Bill's neck and hair intensifies the reader's anticipation of what will happen next.

"Bill was past reasoning with. He never said a word, but came a-tiptoeing down the passage, looking at the boy as if he were wondering which particular tortures of the damned would be the most suitable to inflict on him.": This description of Bill's silent but menacing approach to Red Chief underscores the tension and

the kidnappers' increasing desperation. The phrase "tortures of the damned" suggests Bill's mounting frustration and the drastic measures he contemplates in response to Red Chief's relentless mischief.

"Bill's mind was beginning to weaken. He was feeling the nervous strain." : This line reflects the psychological toll the situation is taking on Bill, highlighting his deteriorating mental state and the rising tension. It suggests that the kidnappers' initial confidence is giving way to fear and uncertainty as they struggle to contain Red Chief's unpredictable behaviour.

"He went back to the cabin and when he came up again he was dragging a tow sack with him." : This action by Sam, retrieving a tow sack, suggests a desperate attempt to restrain Red Chief and regain control of the situation. The urgency and physical effort depicted add to the suspense as readers wonder whether the kidnappers will finally manage to subdue Red Chief or if the chaos will continue.

"I thought I should die laughing." : This statement by the narrator reflects the reflects a skilful blend of humour and irony, capturing the reader's attention and enhancing the overall entertainment value of the story. The narrator's ability to find humour in a frustrating situation adds a layer of complexity to the character and enriches the storytelling.

"I never was more disgusted in my life. I took him by the neck and shook him till his freckles rattled." : The narrator's humorous and slightly exasperated tone is evident here as he describes his frustration with Red

Chief's mischievous behaviour. The phrase "shook him till his freckles rattled" adds a comical exaggeration, highlighting the narrator's disbelief and the absurdity of the situation.

"You've got no more expression than a terracotta warrior." : This simile used by the narrator to describe Bill's stoic demeanour amidst the chaos symbolizes the narrator's detached observation of the events. The comparison to a terracotta warrior, which is a statue known for its impassive expression, underscores the narrator's wry humour and ironic commentary on Bill's inability to control the situation.

"We decided to give ourselves up and lie down and die." : This hyperbolic statement reflects the narrator's melodramatic and humorous outlook on their predicament. The use of exaggerated language enhances the storytelling by adding comedic effect and emphasizing the absurdity of the kidnappers' failed plan.

"I set up and gasped. Bill was standing in the door with his revolver in one hand and a resolution in the other." : The narrator's choice of words like "gasped" and the ironic description of Bill's determined stance with a "resolution" instead of a plan humorously suggests the narrator's surprise and disbelief at Bill's futile attempts to assert control over the situation.

"That boy put me through a torturing night of agony." : The narrator's use of hyperbole to describe the night spent with Red Chief reflects a mix of humour and exaggeration. It highlights the narrator's sarcastic tone

and emphasizes the challenging and unexpected turn of events they face.

The above example lines demonstrate how O. Henry's narrator adopts a humorous and somewhat detached voice in "The Ransom of Red Chief," guiding readers through the absurd events while maintaining a sense of irony

Pedagogical implications

Language teachers can employ the models of close reading and textual analysis to guide students in analysing and interpreting other literary texts. This can be achieved through the following approaches:

Close Reading: Encourage students to closely examine the language used in the text, analysing word choice, sentence structure, and figurative language. For example, students can explore vivid imagery in a poem or the impact of dialogue in a play to understand the author's intentions.

Textual Analysis: Guide students to analyse larger elements like plot, characterization, and theme. They can identify the conflict, rising action, climax, and resolution in a short story or novel and examine how characters' actions and motivations contribute to the overall meaning.

Symbolism and Imagery: Encourage students to identify and interpret symbolism and imagery within the text. They can analyse recurring symbols or colours and discuss their deeper meaning and significance.

Tone and Mood: Help students analyse the author's use of tone and mood to understand the emotional atmosphere of the work. Through examination of language and descriptive

details, students can explore how the author shapes tone and mood and its impact on the reader.

Narrative Techniques: Guide students to analyse narrative techniques employed by the author, such as foreshadowing, flashbacks, or multiple perspectives. Students can examine how these techniques affect pacing, suspense, and overall structure.

Cultural and Historical Context: Assist students in understanding the cultural and historical context in which the literary work was written. Provide background information and discuss relevant historical events or social issues to deepen their understanding of the author's intentions and the work's significance.

By implementing these approaches, language teachers can support students in developing critical thinking skills, enhancing their understanding of literature, and fostering their ability to effectively analyse and interpret various literary texts.

Language teachers can enhance motivation and engagement among students by utilizing the study's findings on the entertaining and engaging nature of O. Henry's storytelling. Teachers can achieve this by selecting engaging literary works, incorporating storytelling techniques, and creating a positive learning environment. This approach fosters students' enthusiasm for literature, encourages active participation, and develops a genuine love for reading, language learning, and literary analysis.

Conclusion

O. Henry's "The Ransom of Red Chief" not only captivates with its humour and surprising twists but also

serves as a valuable resource in language teaching. By studying O. Henry's techniques, students develop critical thinking skills, enhance their language comprehension, and expand their vocabulary. The story's rich themes and cultural contexts foster a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives, while the engaging narrative encourages creativity and narrative proficiency in students' own writing.

For language teachers, O. Henry's work offers a wealth of opportunities to integrate literary analysis into their curriculum. Focusing on literary devices such as foreshadowing and symbolism and discussing their impact on plot twists and character motivations promotes interactive learning and cross-curricular connections. Furthermore, analysing these literary elements not only enhances students' understanding but also provides a structured approach for effective assessment and feedback. By utilizing O. Henry's "The Ransom of Red Chief" techniques, teachers can enhance language teaching through activities such as in-depth literary analysis, language skill development, cultural appreciation, creative thinking

stimulation, and motivation promotion. Strategies can be categorized into literary analysis (introducing irony, discussing humour, and analysing characterization and plot structure), language development (focusing on dialogue and assigning writing activities), cultural exploration (exploring themes and discussing cultural context), and interactive learning (organizing group discussions and presentations and facilitating reflection and evaluation). By actively implementing these techniques in the classroom, teachers cultivate an engaging learning environment that not only enhances students' skills but also boosts their motivation and fosters a deeper appreciation for literature. This results in a more interactive and collaborative learning experience for students.

Overall, "The Ransom of Red Chief" enriches language teaching by promoting literary analysis, cultural exploration, and skill development. Its entertaining and thought-provoking elements make it an excellent tool for engaging students, fostering a love for literature, and enhancing their analytical and creative abilities.

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