

# A Teaching Proposal for English as a Foreign Language Classrooms: Adapting a Short Story from a Silent Short Movie to Promote the Visual-Imagery Strategy as a Reading Comprehension Technique

## *Una propuesta didáctica para el aula de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera: adaptando un relato corto a partir de un cortometraje mudo para promover la Estrategia de Visualización como técnica de comprensión lectora*

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### Abstract

This article introduces a didactic proposal for contexts of teaching English as a foreign language, whose objective is to expose students to using visualization strategies during the reading process. This proposal utilizes two of the most preferred narrative resources for teachers and students: short stories and silent short movies. Their integration in the development of the proposed activities arises from the application of the Dual Coding Theory, where verbal and non-verbal language systems complement each other, enhancing reading comprehension, memory, and language acquisition. Due to the characteristics of the resources and the strategy used, the theoretical framework's bases apply to any context of teaching a foreign language, not only to teaching English.

**Keywords:** short stories, short movies, imagery, dual coding theory, visual-imagery strategy, verbal language, non-verbal language.

### Resumen

El presente artículo presenta una propuesta didáctica para contextos de enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera, cuyo objetivo es exponer al alumnado al uso de estrategias de visualización durante el proceso de lectura. Dicha propuesta hace uso de dos de los recursos narrativos preferidos por docentes y estudiantes: los relatos cortos y los cortometrajes mudos. Su integración en el desarrollo de las actividades propuestas surge de la aplicación de la Teoría de la Codificación Dual, en donde los sistemas de lenguaje verbal y no verbal se complementan potenciando la comprensión lectora, la memoria y la adquisición del lenguaje. Debido a las características particulares de los recursos y la estrategia utilizada, las bases del marco teórico son aplicables a cualquier contexto de enseñanza de una lengua extranjera, y no únicamente a la enseñanza del inglés.

**Palabras clave:** relatos cortos, cortometrajes, imágenes mentales, teoría de la codificación dual, estrategia de visualización, lenguaje verbal, lenguaje no verbal.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Nowadays, literacy plays the same essential role as more than 5,000 years ago. Through reading and writing acquisition, people become literate individuals capable of coping with society's demands, dominated more than ever by the written word. Under these conditions, promoting reading habits and writing skills are two of the most critical areas in Foreign Language Teaching<sup>1</sup>.

(FLT). And similar to what happens with the literacy process of mother tongues, promoting reading in an autonomous and pleasurable way is one of the most significant challenges.

Its complexity lies in its own nature since literacy promotion requires «cultivating a culture of reading, increasing the visibility and availability of reading materials and promoting reading in all its forms, through diverse materials, online and offline». (European Commission, 2012, p. 39). Therefore, teachers are required to provide broad opportunities for students to cultivate their reading and writing skills both in and outside the classrooms of English as a Foreign Language<sup>2</sup> (EFL).

«The best of both worlds» is an English idiom that defines a situation where you simultaneously enjoy the advantages of two different things (Cambridge University Press, 2022). Such an expression portrays the essence of this article, which aims to underline the benefits that both short stories and silent short movies provide in FLT. The communion of these two modes of storytelling seizes the promotion of reading comprehension and language acquisition, the development of receptive and productive skills required in Foreign Language Learning<sup>3</sup>, and the development of positive attitudes and feelings towards literacy<sup>4</sup> and autonomous learning through reading and video watching in a foreign language.

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<sup>1</sup> Foreign Language Teaching is addressed as FLT hereafter.

<sup>2</sup> English as a Foreign Language is addressed as EFL hereafter.

<sup>3</sup> Foreign Language Learning is addressed as FLL hereafter.

<sup>4</sup> *Literacy* is understood as the development and promotion of reading and writing skills.

This article includes a series of methodological recommendations applicable in foreign language teaching classrooms through mental images or *imagery*. Mental imagery strategies are essential in the effective marriage of short stories and silent short movies, as they help students generate mental representations with visual properties that act as cognitive bridges between verbal and nonverbal languages. However, before delving into methodological matters, we will analyze the main advantages of using short stories and silent short movies as materials for imagery strategies.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This section will introduce three key concepts: short stories, silent short movies, and visualization strategies; three key concepts that guide the methodological proposal presented here for FLL in general, and the design of materials for EFL in particular.

### **2.1 Short stories**

Short stories<sup>5</sup> stand out as valuable reading materials in EFL contexts for promoting students' literacy in a successful and meaningful way. Their main characteristic is the length with which they portray a variety of genres, making them excellent pieces of literature suitable for working in environments with restrictive time, mandatory curricular elements, and fleeting attention spans of the student body (Parlindungan, 2012). From a linguistic point of view, its authentic and condensed lexicon provides a practical exposition of the linguistic features of the writings and its reduced structure, which illustrates how narratives are built (Sell, 2005). For this reason, S-Stories represent one of the favorite genres for both teachers and students (Kabooha, 2016).

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<sup>5</sup> *Short Stories* is addressed as S-Stories hereafter, reducing wordiness and easing the reading experience.

### **2.1.1 From literary genre to a teaching tool**

S-Stories are as ancient as our human existence. Before the invention of the written word, ancient societies used stories and chronicles as a means of leisure and education, thus becoming creative methods of cultural transmission. These short literary works were initially transmitted through oral language and visual representations: the only two modes of communication before the invention of the written word. For this reason, S-Stories are strongly related to communicative purposes, where comprehension skills play a fundamental role. With the development of the written word, S-Stories diversified. And by the end of the 17th century, they were consolidated as a unique literary genre currently considered the newest of the literary genres (Patea, 2015). Since then, they evolved along with society's demands and began to acquire a solid character to convey human perspectives in a meaningful and convenient way.

These days, S-Stories represent the most versatile literary work, utilized in various formats and audiovisual registers ranging from more traditional texts of less than 10,000 words to songs, poems, fairy tales, and, curiously enough, short films. Likewise, with the rise of ICTs, stories have been able to modernize for mass distribution to fit a 280-character tweet or a 2,200-character Instagram caption. Therefore, it is safe to say that S-Stories represent the most accessible literary genre for our students today. In this context, language teachers play a crucial role in highlighting their existence around the closest reality of the student body. Going beyond traditional concepts, we can increase the visibility and availability of texts that foster a reading culture through diverse materials.

The development of S-Stories as a didactic tool is linked to the Grammar Translation Method in FLT, which originated from studying dead languages such as Latin and ancient Greek. Starting in the 20th century, linguist experts such as Hymes and Savignon determined how this practice neglects the understanding of language as a means of communication, ignoring the sense of correctness and adequacy of living languages in interaction with others. Although this change resulted in a significant discredit in the use of literature, from the 70s, the communicative approach could not but recognize its importance in language teaching contexts, for the problem was the method and not the instrument. Since then, scholars have

agreed that «those who read more show more literacy development» (Krashen, 2007, p. 2), highlighting the relationship between reading and literacy development.

### **2.1.2 Their benefits in FLL**

Along with the literature, researchers pinpoint language learning and literacy development as the most salient benefits of S-Stories (Panavelil, 2013; Pérez Ruiz & Santamaría Molinero, 2003; Stein, 2012; Xhemaili, 2013). In summary, the following benefits stand out in contexts of FLL, although they are not limited to those listed below:

- **Linguistic development and reading comprehension:** the use of literature contributes to better linguistic awareness, a greater mastery of the language, an appreciation of literary features, and an integral development of all linguistic skills. More specifically, language and grammar activities carried out before, during, and after reading play an essential role in letting the story's meaning emerge (Stein, 2012), thus becoming authentic sources of linguistic input. Additionally, Sell (2005) and Stein (2012) consider S-Stories genuine models for language output, critical thinking, emotional awareness, and creativity, all of which are relevant in making students move from a stage of decoding to encoding and producing texts.
- **Development of critical thinking, personal growth, and work on emotions:** In Sell's words, «Better than any other discipline, literature trains the mind and sensibility.» (2005, p. 2), which allows students to grow at personal and cognitive levels. In addition, S-Stories encourage personal growth by allowing a space to share experiences, emotions, and beliefs in an environment where students do not necessarily expose themselves. Thus, students can air individual concerns through fictional characters and events without a sense of self-exposure (Panavelil, 2013; Stein, 2012).
- **Cultural development and intercultural awareness:** S-Stories benefit culture acquisition and awareness by exposing students to cultural and social practices from both the target and non-target language, which ultimately promotes cultural awareness (Xhemaili, 2013). In particular, the English language is acknowledged world-

wide as a universal communication system that allows students to learn *from* and participate *in* society on a multicultural level, starting from the English culture but including other communities with different mother tongues (Sell, 2005).

## **2.2 Silent short movies**

Similarly, short films have also proven to be successful tools in FLT contexts. They improve comprehension and motivation through images, promote listening and speaking skills, and are highly regarded among students and teachers. The developed material presented here goes a step further and focuses on the use of silent short movies<sup>6</sup>. Their value for teaching lies in their development of a single idea in a visual, aesthetic form, which enhances students' comprehension of events and creates opportunities to supply the language with students' outputs, hence promoting productive skills (Donaghy, 2013). In addition, SS-Movies make students more aware of metalinguistic cues (Rinda Kartika et al., 2018) and focus on students' critical thinking skills, imagination, and comprehension of images (Hutapea & Arie Suwastini, 2019).

From a teaching perspective, S-Stories and SS-Movies can be perceived as complementary modes in which different storytelling elements are highlighted. While S-Stories are full of linguistic input and language functions, SS-Movies draw the plot in a visual, attractive, and comprehensive form. In short, the communion of these two modes is based on the idea that one lacks what the other grants.

### **2.2.1 From narrative instrument to a teaching tool**

The film industry's history is relatively short compared to S-Stories', yet they represent one of the greatest creations used to convey narratives. Curiously, the first massively generated films at the end of the 19th century were intended to communicate daily situations, just as stories did in their origins. Likewise, cinema stood out as a means of leisure and education, revealing its use as a tool for cultural transmission.

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<sup>6</sup> *Silent Short Movies* is addressed as SS-Movies hereafter, reducing wordiness and easing the reading experience

In the beginning, all films were short, with an average time of less than an hour, as well as mute, introducing orchestras and soundtracks after recording to follow the scene's atmosphere. Consequently, its purpose was communicative, making the audience show their thinking skills to interpret and make sense of the visual and aural imagery composition. Although SS-Movies were relegated with the introduction of sound movies during the 1930s, SS-Movies were able to find their particular niche that lasts to this day in cartoon movies, political and social propaganda, musical clips, and even social media (Wagner, 2022). Once again, we can assert that short films represent one of the most accessible cinematographic genres for our students, which makes it crucial to highlight their existence around their closest reality and beyond mere leisure (Pérez Ruiz & Santamaría Molinero, 2003).

Around the 1970s, S-Movies embodied a crucial turning point in traditional models<sup>7</sup> of FLT, as they brought different levels of «authenticity, reality, variety, and flexibility into EFL classrooms» (Stoller, 1988, p. 3). In the 2000s, its use spread significantly with the emergence of digital teaching resources that reduced the time for selecting and preparing materials (Goctu, 2017). Today, with abundant and free access to countless online teaching materials, social networks, and streaming platforms, it is easier than ever to include movies and clips as part of our teaching practice. Eventually, this enables the transmission of cultural aspects and facilitates a diversity of learning styles, strategies, and techniques (Widiatmoko, 2014).

### **2.2.2 Their benefits in FLL**

Researchers consistently underline similar advantages to support the use of movies in EFL contexts, such as the enrichment of the teaching-learning process, the suitability for space-time constraints, and the proven enhancement of language and its contextualization along with culture, among others. Once more, researchers emphasize the following benefits, although they are not limited to the ones presented below:

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<sup>7</sup> The referred *traditional models* comprise the different structural methods used until the first half of the 20th century, including the Grammar-translation and Audio-lingual methods developed under the Language-Based Approach.

- **Development of a varied and transversal curriculum:** short films stand out as flexible instruments that diversify the study plan and guarantee a wide variety of linguistic and cultural experiences (Goctu, 2017; Stoller, 1988; Xhemaili, 2013). Many researchers promote its use as an integral part of the curricular design in developing the four linguistic skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) since they provide contextual information that contributes to the development of communicative competence (Kabooha, 2016; Hidayet, 2014).
- **Development of critical thinking, personal growth, and work on emotions:** as with stories, short films are an attractive tool with which to deal with relevant topics close to students with a wide range of group and cooperative activities, such as work in pairs, debates or role-plays (Donaghy, 2013; Kabooha, 2016; Hidayet, 2014). In addition, short films have proven effective in building students' personalities through the work of emotions, companionship, and linguistic and metalinguistic signals in authentic communicative exchanges (Kabooha, 2016). Under this context, the development of critical thinking skills arises spontaneously.
- **Development of linguistic and communicative competence:** films and series provide more authenticity than audio recordings, thus ensuring more genuine exchanges among FLL students (Goctu, 2017). Consequently, students' communicative competence develops from the necessity to be effective in the target foreign language. This translates into linguistic knowledge (such as grammatical structures), sociolinguistic notions, and functional levels of assertiveness and appropriateness (i.e., knowing *what* to speak, *when*, *to whom*, or in *what way*).

### **2.3 Imagery**

Imagery refers to any evoked visualization in our minds, whose nature is linked to a variety of human perceptions and notions, such as sight, taste, touch, smell, feelings, words, and meanings (Kocaarslan, 2016, p. 677). Its application in educational contexts resulted in the creation of the visualization strategy, or Visual Imagery Strategy in English (Chan et al., 1990), which aims to promote active participation, processing, comprehension, and memory of words and concepts throughout the reading process. In

FLL, this visualization strategy is used to make students generate mental representations with visual properties. These images act as cognitive bridges between verbal and non-verbal languages, making reading comprehension possible (Sukanya Devi & Sia, 2020, p. 518).

### **2.3.1 Theories of mental imagery**

Since Allan Paivio introduced the concept in 1971, multiple theories emerged attempting to explain how our minds cope with the language of images or *imagery*. In his Theory of Propositional Representation, Pylyshyn (1973) depicted mental imagery as an epiphenomenon in which the mind turns the perception of reality into symbols (Sukanya Devi & Sia, 2020; The Imagery Debate, 2022). This implies that our minds create mental propositions with external stimuli, which trigger other associated propositions. For instance, when encountering the word *flower*, our minds generate a series of propositions in relation to a personal schema of attributes that we associate with it. Likely concepts to arise in our minds might be *plant*, *petal*, *beautiful*, or *delicate*, among others.

While this theory highlights the importance of linguistic mechanisms, Stephen Kosslyn's Theory of Spatial Representation (1994) states that mental images organize around perceptual (sensory) and linguistic mechanisms (Sukanya Devi & Sia, 2020; The Imagery Debate, 2022). Kosslyn's experiments demonstrated how our minds create mental pictures of events simultaneously with other cognitive tasks (e.g., reading), both consciously and subconsciously. Also, he realized that our minds do so regardless of whether the stimulus is linguistic or sensory (i.e., whether we read/hear the word 'flower' or see/perceive a flower). Following the previous example of the flower, this theory explains that apart from the linguistic clues, our minds evoke the mental image of a flower (e.g., a green stem with leaves and a corolla of petals).

On its behalf, the latest cognitive neuroscience and psychology research try to make these theories meet halfway by claiming that *perception* and *visualization* relate to two different cognitive processes. While perception is considered a bottom-up process where external sensory stimuli trigger the creation of visual images, visualization is a top-down mechanism in which mental images generate without external stimuli. This implies that «perception occurs automatically and remains relatively stable, whereas imagery needs effort and is

fragile» (The Imagery Debate, 2022). To continue with the example, the perception process involves reading, hearing, seeing, or perceiving a flower around us, which triggers our mental image of what a flower *is* and *feels*. On the contrary, visualization involves the voluntary recovery of a particular mental picture of what a flower *is* and *feels like* to evoke it mentally and verbally.

### **2.3.2 Dual Coding Theory: verbal and nonverbal systems applied to reading**

Although the debate is still alive between scholars, one theory stands out for its multiple applications in educational contexts. Paivio's contributions to the use of imagery have resulted in one of the most consistent theories in cognitive neuroscience and psychology: the Dual Coding Theory<sup>8</sup>. His theory identifies nonverbal and verbal systems for mental representations that specialize in processing imagery and linguistic information correspondingly (Clark & Paivio, 1991, p. 150). In applying his theory in education, the Visual-Imagery Strategy<sup>9</sup> has emerged as an effective approach that requires subjects to create pictures in their minds during the reading process, which promotes active engagement, processing, comprehension, and recall of words and concepts (Alley et al., 1984; Chan et al., 1990; Clark & Paivio, 1991; Divine-Hawkins & Levin, 1974).

Paivio's rationale behind the application of imagery in promoting reading comprehension falls under a dual-coding system in which verbal and *non-verbal* cognitive modes interact in decoding the meaning of texts (Clark & Paivio, 1991; Nielsen Hibbing & Rankin-Erickson, 2003; Paivio, 2006). As he explains, these two systems generate different modes of representation: while verbal representations include words, concepts, events, or ideas, *non-verbal* representations include an individual language of images, or *imagery*, designed from perceptions or experiences. Connections that occur solely within each of these modes are called *associative*. Associative connections between words imply a semantic/thematic link and a perceptual/sensory link between images (Clark & Paivio, 1991; Paivio, 2006).

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<sup>8</sup> Dual-Coding Theory is addressed as DCT hereafter.

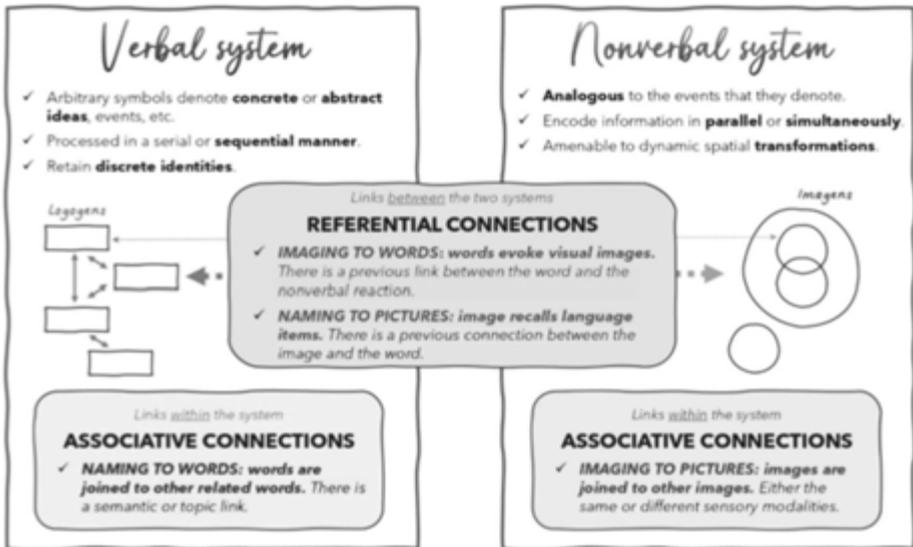
<sup>9</sup> Visual-Imagery Strategy is addressed as VIS hereafter.

Going back to the example of the flower, our verbal system might evoke the word *flower* itself, or as stated before, other concrete or abstract concepts as well (*plant, petal, beautiful, delicate, etc.*). Similarly, we might generate ideas or conceptions such as «a flower is something beautiful, smells good, blossoms, or gives allergy,» for instance. On the other hand, our imagery might evoke mental pictures of what a flower *is* and *feels*, including its shape, smell, colors, or touch. Likewise, particular moments can arise in connection to a flower, such as picking up flowers or gifting a bouquet.

However, the most relevant part of the DCT for this paper rests in the *referential connections* between the verbal and non-verbal systems, which may occur in two forms: either a word evokes images, or an image recalls language items. In both cases, word and image must share a previous link or connection, for referential connections cannot occur without it. For connections between words and images to occur, the individual must have the background knowledge to connect image and word. In other words, our minds can only establish a referential association between the word ‘flower’ and its *imagery* if we can recall a context in which the connections were previously created, such as when learning about flowers at school or picking up flowers.

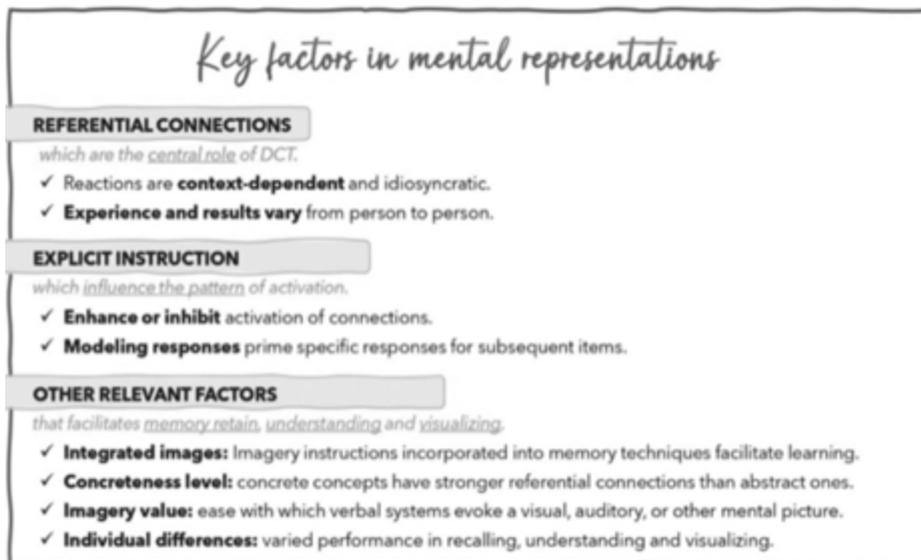
**Figure 1**

*Scheme of verbal and non-verbal systems*



Note. *Imagery and verbal mental representations*, Clark & Paivio, 1991, pp. 151-153. Own elaboration.

**Figure 2**  
Key factors in mental representations



Note. *Processing assumptions of the Dual Coding Theory*, Clark & Paivio, 1991, pp. 153-156. Own elaboration.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

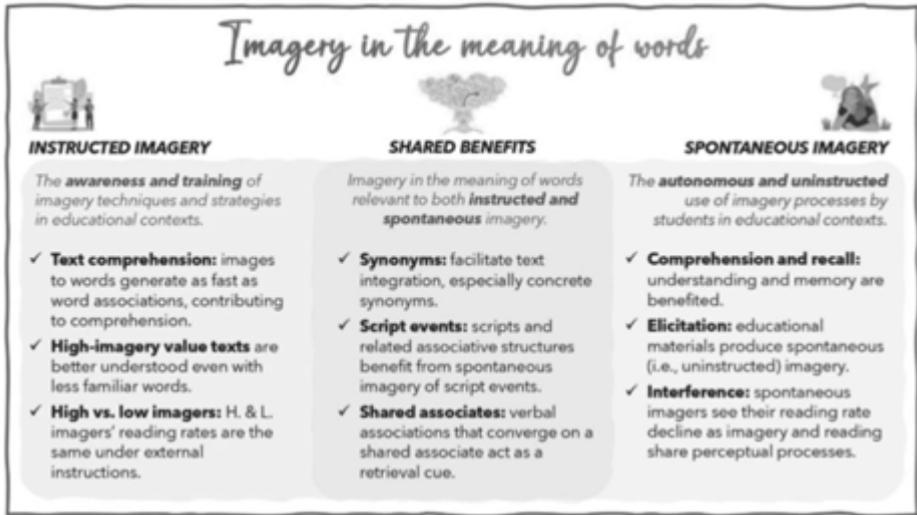
#### 3.1 The application of the Visual-Imagery Strategy in FLL

When developing activities based on imagery, it is positive to assume that all students can use a VIS at different proficiency levels, but not so much that all students have the internal resources to carry it out successfully. Hence, the initial stages in the activities developed must seek to generate in students a verbal and imagery knowledge background from which to build language learning and recall, which ultimately enhances reading comprehension (Alley et al., 1984; Chan et al., 1990; Clark & Paivio, 1991; Divine-Hawkins & Levin, 1974; Kocaarslan, 2016; Nielsen Hibbing & Rankin-Erickson, 2003; Sukanya Devi & Sia, 2020).

In fact, explicit instruction is a crucial element in developing successful activities. Researchers have shown that direct instruction influences the word-image pattern of activation, allowing teachers to enhance or inhibit specific referential connections. As stated previously, Kosslyn's

experiments demonstrated that our minds consciously and subconsciously create mental pictures. By redirecting students' conscious and subconscious imagery with explicit instructions, we aim to model specific responses in students during the reading process, which is the essence of the VIS.

**Figure 3**  
*Imagery in the meaning of words*



Note. *Imagery processes in the meaning of words and text*, Clark & Paivio, 1991, pp. 158-162. Own elaboration.

Thanks to the investigations of Alley et al. (1984) and Chan et al. (1990), we know that the amount of time and practice required to master the strategy requires extra teaching training and support for students, which leads to a second relevant aspect; the gradual withdrawal of external support. For students to use the VIS autonomously, it is necessary to encourage its independent application once understood.

Since most imagery training tends to be verbally directed (for example, when we ask students to generate mental images of what is happening in the story), we must plan its use carefully. Research has shown that the most beneficial way is to train visualization before reading and with the support of resources that promote the creation of spontaneous mental images, such as photographs.

The application of the VIS is beneficial in students with high and low reading performance. We know that the most successful readers apply the VIS spontaneously, thus improving their understanding and memory of events (Alley et al., 1984; Chan et al., 1990; Clark & Paivio, 1991; Nielsen Hibbing & Rankin-Erickson, 2003). In turn, they develop positive attitudes toward reading, produce more vivid images, and perform better on reading tasks (Kocaarslan, 2016).

More clues about why using a visual strategy is beneficial can be found in both high and low achievers. On the one hand, multiple researchers found that successful readers apply imagery spontaneously, which enhances their comprehension and memory of events (Alley et al., 1984; Chan et al., 1990; Clark & Paivio, 1991; Nielsen Hibbing & Rankin-Erickson, 2003). Students who are good at visualizing develop positive attitudes toward reading, produce more vivid imagery and perform better in reading assignments (Kocaarslan, 2016). We also know that students with difficulties cannot efficiently connect verbal and non-verbal languages. In the classroom reality, this translates into readers whose sole focus is decoding words, ignoring gaps in comprehension, and neglecting to use visualization and correction strategies. Therefore, explicit training in these strategies significantly changes their reading performance.

Regarding memory and recall, researchers found that using a VIS strengthens the relationship between words, images, and memory (Clark & Paivio, 1991). Using a VIS strengthens the relationship between words, images, and memory, multiplying the chances of an item being retrieved from long-term visual and verbal memory. By using SS-Movies and their written adaptation, the success in memorizing and remembering images and language can become more significant.

**Figure 4**  
*Imagery, comprehension, and recall in EFL*

<i>Imagery, comprehension and recall in EFL</i>		
TEXT COMPREHENSION	VOCABULARY RECALL	KEY FACTORS IN RECALLING
<i>proven effects in text memory and comprehension</i>	<i>proven effects in vocabulary memory</i>	<i>general proven effects in learning through imagery</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The <b>additive effect</b> of imagery and verbal codes is better than a verbal code alone.</li> <li>✓ <b>Concrete</b> phrases, sentences, and paragraphs are remembered better than abstract text.</li> <li>✓ Texts <b>activate preexisting</b> semantic structures. But when previous <b>knowledge is unavailable</b>, comprehension builds around linguistic cues to identify importance and centrality.</li> <li>✓ <b>Spontaneous imagery</b> reports better recall in subjects than those who do not.</li> <li>✓ <b>Imagery instructions</b> report the best recall in subjects than those who do not.</li> <li>✓ Internal images from <b>life insights</b> are central to models of effective reading and writing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Associative knowledge</b> is the connection between verbal representations through referential links to nonverbal components.</li> <li>✓ Associative relations are the primary source of meaning for <b>abstract words</b>.</li> <li>✓ <b>Indirect verbal associations</b> contribute to retrieval:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a <b>shared associate</b> elicits multiple words or phrases.</li> <li>• a <b>partial cue</b> reactivates an entire representation (i.e., reintegration).</li> <li>• the <b>keyword mnemonic technique</b> allows linking new items with familiar keywords that sound alike.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Generating images</b> produces:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• better recall than repeated encoding conditions.</li> <li>• better memory than translating or generating synonyms.</li> </ul> </li> <li>✓ <b>Methods</b> to a better recall:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Associative operations</b> (e.g., outlining, summarizing, etc.).</li> <li>• <b>Spatial methods</b> to represent verbal relations (e.g., hierarchical trees, diagrams, etc.)</li> </ul> </li> <li>✓ The <b>amount and recency</b> of instruction make it more likely to respond with other terms on the list related to the stimulus word.</li> </ul>

Note. *Memory, comprehension, and associative knowledge in learning of the Dual Coding Theory*, Clark & Paivio, 1991, pp. 158-173. Own elaboration.

Lastly, and despite all the benefits mentioned, there is evidence that the use of imagery while reading is a challenging task. Divine-Hawkins and Levin (1974) found that imagery instruction results better in listening than reading. Researchers point out that this is likely because the same cognitive areas drive reading and imagery. «When two tasks have the same code, interference between them is stronger because resources are derived from the same memory store for representation and processing.» (Sukanya Devi & Sia, 2020, p. 518). This is why VIS is recommended only under careful planning, sufficient learning time, and explicit instruction, three elements that have received special attention in the material design presented here.

## 4. DEVELOPMENT OF MATERIALS

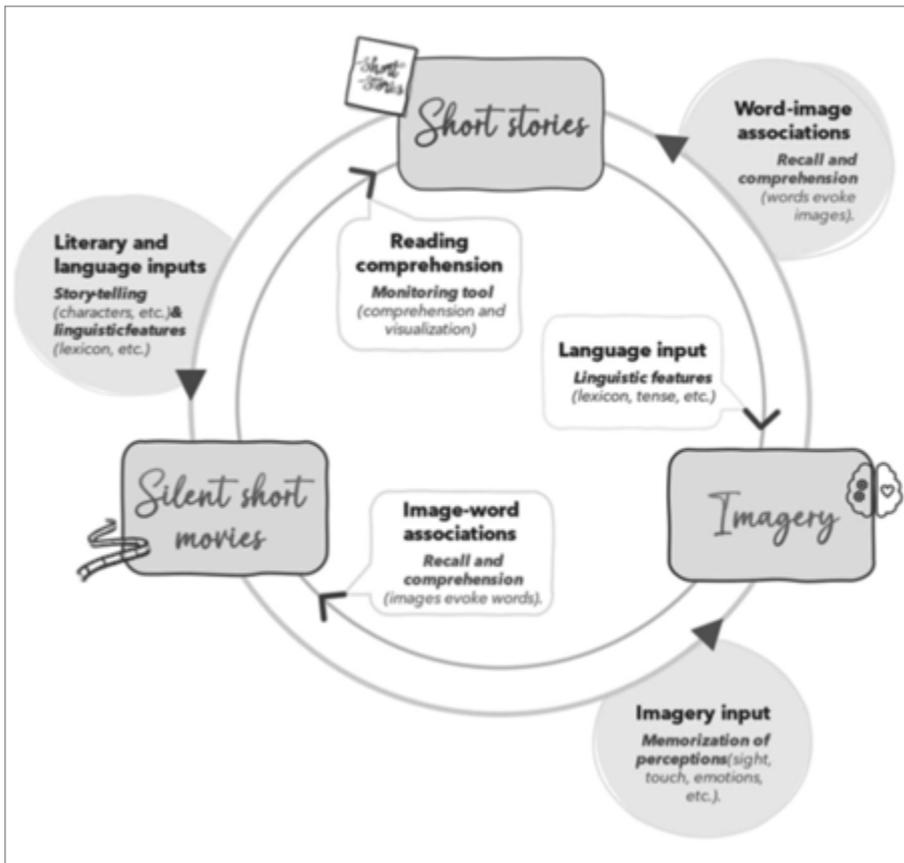
### 4.1 The integration of short stories, silent short movies, and imagery

Despite SS-Movies lacking language input and S-Stories motion imagery, both modes can be integrated into a teaching sequence where their par-

ticular characteristics promote and target students' use of *imagery*. By doing such, students see their reading comprehension, memory retention and recall, engagement with the text, and thinking skills enhanced (Alley et al., 1984; Clark & Paivio, 1991; Divine-Hawkins & Levin, 1974; Chan et al., 1990). A flowchart is included below for a more visual explanation of how these three elements are expected to interconnect.

**Figure 5**

*The integration of short stories, silent short movies, and imagery*



Integrating S-Stories stories and short films into a teaching sequence requires a holistic approach. Their benefits cover multiple fields, including sociolinguistic and cultural aspects, cognition, character building, and autonomous learning. For this reason, the didactic proposal must promote

various competencies integrated into a teaching-learning sequence that encompasses much more than mere linguistic notions. Deliberately reducing the weight of language in favor of a more holistic methodology helps to visualize the concept of language not as an objective but as a vehicle to engage in successful interactions with others.

Using SS-Movies responds to two fundamental purposes. The first is to obtain all the benefits of using short films mentioned above. The second is to generate a language gap through which to promote reading. When listening skills are set aside, the opportunity arises for a written version of the story to be introduced. Additionally, there is room for the creative use of language and the awareness of the metalinguistic keys of the scenes, which test students' critical thinking (Rinda Kartika et al., 2018, p. 2).

#### **4.2 Adapting a short story from a silent short movie**

The didactic proposal is structured around adapting a short film into a short story. The basis of this approach is to benefit from the combination of short films and S-Stories. Although most adaptations tend to be from book to film, the creation of a short story from a short film provides a series of specific benefits and peculiarities in FLL.

When teachers take control over the design of materials used, there is room for personalization and individualization of the teaching-learning process. This proposal visualizes teachers as potential authors of adapted S-Stories, encouraging them to create small literary pieces from those SS-Movies most significant to their classroom's reality and needs. Every teacher works in unique contexts where it is necessary to specifically work on daily life issues, perspectives, values, and traits relevant to their cultures, societies, and populations.

Teachers' management and production of different narrative styles, such as stories, fables, rhymes, or poems, promote their mastery of the foreign language and its continuous learning. In addition, elaborating own materials expands the availability of the story-movie catalog since it is not limited to the available film productions adapted from a short story. On the contrary, teachers create their literary pieces with the repertoire of all available films and short films created.

From this perspective, students gain key advantages by making the reading process meaningful, engaging, and more autonomous. Considering that students must know about 98% of the words in an authentic text to interact with it (Stein, 2012), adapted literature allows students to improve their comprehension, consolidate prior knowledge, and reduce frustration during reading practice. In the same way, it is easier to promote student autonomy with activities that avoid dependence on the teacher or require a more dominant role during the learning process (Pérez Ruiz & Santamaría Molinero, 2003).

However, despite the multiple benefits exposed, the reality is that adapting and preparing a short story is not an easy task nor one that all teachers can achieve. Lack of time, experience, or interest may make this method unsuitable for all FLT contexts. However, we can acknowledge that the artistic contribution of a single teacher in an educational center would be a generous contribution that would benefit an entire academic community for years.

The adapted short story provided in this article was created in 2021 as a final project for the subject *Short Stories* of the Master in Teaching English as a Foreign Language. Written and illustrated by me, it aims to capture the essence of the short film that inspired it, «Piper» (Allan Barillaro, 2016). Emotive and near to students' reality and problems, this SS-Movie provides the proper context for FLL through meaningful interactions where ethical values and critical thinking skills are cultivated.

The adaptation of the story was made considering the use of a wide range of vocabulary and expressions found in real-life situations and authentic literature. In this sense, the aim is not to adapt the story to students' level as EFL resources would but to make students cope with the text at the level they can reach. Hence, the story contains high-and low-frequency vocabulary items and expressions indistinctly.

Another relevant matter was elaborating a piece of writing that would allow curricular and cross-curricular links. On the one hand, the S-Story includes curricular elements that benefit EFL (rhymes, vocabulary, chunks, idioms, descriptions, structure of short stories, chronological events, re-adaptation of a narrative, other genres such as narrative, comic, theatre scripts, etc.). On

the other hand, the S-Story promotes the work of cross-curricular elements such as the coast life and its biodiversity, the habitat and feeding habits of sandpipers, storytelling through images and drawings, audiovisual materials, critical thinking skills, tolerance to frustration, and learning to learn.

The methodology is carried out in a reading-viewing sequence, i.e., students first handle the short story and finish with the short film. One of the reasons is that the short movie rewards students' effort in understanding and working on the reading. The film acts by solving comprehension problems, and the post-viewing activities guide students to verify the level of comprehension achieved of the story. Meanwhile, the reading part acts as a source of vocabulary and grammatical structures and facilitates the application of visualization strategies autonomously.

Lastly, the proposal includes other resources and materials that SS-Movies provide, such as the soundtrack and the teaser trailer. By utilizing them during the pre-reading activities, students become more involved and motivated with the reading process, making it easier to predict settings, characters, or events in the story. For instance, the different instruments and rhythms of the original soundtrack can encourage speculation about whether the plot includes adventures, moments of tension, happy events, etc. With this, we arouse students' interest and let their imagination play a part in the reading process, making reading more intriguing to discover whether their predictions and speculations agree with their previous ideas.

### **4.3 Criteria for the design of materials and the sequencing of the methodological proposal**

This last section details the teaching-learning sequence where the three main elements are integrated with the rest of the materials used. Regarding the target student, this proposal has been developed specifically for the last years of primary school (fifth and sixth degrees), but the methodology could be adapted for older ones. It is important to know that from a cognitive development perspective, using visualization strategies is most effective from the age of eleven to twelve and onwards. Mastering words and images to represent their reality (Cherry, 2022) is vital for applying VIS, a strategy based on the cognitive ability to perceive and produce symbolic thought (Piaget, 1969).

Likewise, linking language and thought processes when moving from concrete objects to abstract ideas requires the ability to think in a logical and organized way, which is essential to deal with the facts and elements of a plot. Additionally, from this age, students begin to use inductive logic; a fundamental piece in developing thinking skills and making inferences and predictions about the plot.

Regarding the short film selected, *Piper* (2016) is a six-minute film that teaches a moral lesson about fear and the courage to overcome it. Written and directed by Allan Barillaro and produced by Pixar Animation Studios, it won the Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film in 2017. This SS-Movie tells the story of a baby sandpiper (a kind of shore bird) named Piper. Her mother encourages her to leave the nest and join the rest of the flock to hunt. However, when Piper tries and fails, she refuses to go near the seashore until she sees a curious group of hermit crabs.

This short film is accompanied by a delicate original soundtrack (OST) composed by Adrian Belew (2016) that flawlessly complements Piper's adventures and emotions, making it easier to guide students' imagery and plot predictions. In addition, a teaser trailer is available for free through the official YouTube account of Disney Studios LA. These resources help us feed students' imagination in activities that promote a more authentic use of the foreign language, such as conveying ideas, opinions, and predictions.

Finally, developing a printed guide with activities accompanying students during the learning process is essential. Thus, students can capture their learning process and check their milestones as the activities are carried out. In addition, the development of printed activities allows teachers to adapt the content and format of the material, adding indications about the completion of activities, challenges for more advanced students, bits of advice, examples, explanations, etc. Activities should be visually appealing, with a clear structure and organization that allows students to know what to do at each step in the process.

#### **4.3.1 Pre-reading activities**

Regarding the timing, the proposal is developed in activities to be carried out before, during, and after the reading. The pre-activities aim to capture

students' interest, introduce the target language, and feed their imagination through activities where associations between verbal and non-verbal languages are established. Although the most widely used resource is photography accompanied by the written word, we can avoid the over-exploitation of static images by manipulating objects (realia in English), thus favoring manipulative learning. Another key material is the soundtrack and the teaser trailer, which nourish students' imagination with sound and visual experiences.

Regarding motivation, different collaborative methodologies can be used, such as Aronson's Puzzle or the Think-Pair-Share strategy. These methods have proven effective in promoting engagement, collaboration, and autonomous learning, allowing students to interact more naturally and spontaneously in the target language through meetings and discussions in small groups or pairs, which ultimately demands a sense of responsibility during the learning process.

#### **4.3.2 While-reading activities**

The while-reading activities aim to introduce students to reading in a staggered and organized way, giving the necessary support at each step of the process. During these activities, assessing students' autonomous use of VIS while exploring the story, its illustrations, meaning, and language is crucial. It is worthwhile to start with a silent reading that guarantees students tackle the story at their own reading pace and within their comprehension needs. During this activity, the spontaneous and autonomous use of the VIS is encouraged, linking prior knowledge from previous activities with the reading process.

After that, the reading process can continue with group reading, the most suitable method for practicing pronunciation and intonation and becoming aware of linguistic characteristics such as rhythm and musicality. By directly guiding students, we can explicitly introduce the Visual-Imagery Strategy by modeling and structuring its application with verbal and visual aids. Likewise, we can model the use of repair strategies by doing comprehension checks about the plot.

This phase can conclude with methodologies such as storytelling, a fun and motivating activity that reinforces a positive vision of the reading process.

In addition, this methodology allows teachers to interact and communicate with students at eye level, avoiding distractions and improving visual and auditory conditions.

### **4.3.3 Post-reading activities**

They aim to reward the students' effort in previous phases by viewing the short film and adapting the plot, thus promoting the understanding of the story and the production of language. On the one hand, watching the short film after reading acts as a comprehension tool and fosters a discussion environment with students to check their predictions and vision of the story. These interactions promote the oral production of the foreign language, making use of the target vocabulary.

From a cognitive point of view, the short film feeds and connects students' non-verbal representations to coincide with the verbal input received through the story, reinforcing the referential connections. In addition, employing thinking strategies such as «I used to think... / Now I think...» allow students to self-assess their reading comprehension level before and after watching the movie.

The proposal ends with students elaborating a written piece to facilitate free linguistic production, taking advantage of the short story's linguistic model. Thus, students find an authentic way to use new words and structures acquired during the previous stages. For this, it is essential not to expect students to naturally consider stories as language models and anticipate what to do autonomously. Instead, we can use the thinking strategy «We are learning to... / What I am looking for is...», which helps them visualize in a straightforward way how to plan the writing to meet the designed learning objectives.

## **4.4 Resources, materials, and students' handout of the proposal**

Finally, all the resources designed or used for the methodological proposal are presented in this section. Each pre-, while- and after-reading stages have another two phases each, making it a total of six. The students' handout design has also been included in the table for each of the six phases.

**Table 1**  
*Resources and Materials. Pre-reading activities 1 and 2*

<b>RESOURCES AND MATERIALS: PRE-READING ACTIVITIES</b>	
<b>Pre-reading activities 1: Realia</b>	
<p><b>RESOURCES:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Realia: sand, water, crab shells, clams, small and big feathers, rocks, salt, seaweed, or any other item related to the setting and characters of the story.</li> <li>• Students' handout.</li> <li>• Dictionaries.</li> </ul> <p><b>ACTIVITIES:</b> necessary for activities 1, 2, and 3 of students' handouts.</p>	
<div style="border: 1px dashed gray; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>THE ARONSON'S PUZZLE</b></p>  <p><i>Remember that...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You need to <i>interact and communicate</i> with others.</li> <li>• Each member is <i>responsible</i> for sharing the information from the Experts group.</li> <li>• Your <i>motivation, implication and effort</i> are important. So, try to do your best! 😊</li> </ul> </div> <div style="border: 1px dashed gray; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>HOW TO DISCUSS</b></p>  <p><i>Remember that...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• it is better to vote for a <i>secretary</i> to organize the speaking turns.</li> <li>• <i>Listening</i> is as important as speaking. Be patient and let your classmates talk.</li> </ul> </div> <div style="border: 1px dashed gray; padding: 5px;"> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>KEY INFORMATION</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">ACTIVITY 3. </p> <p><i>Remember! Story elements:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> The plot is what the story is about (<i>argumento</i>).</li> <li>The characters are the main roles of the story (<i>personajes</i>).</li> <li> The setting is the time and place of the story (<i>escenario</i>).</li> </ul> </div>	<div style="background-color: #f0f0f0; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p><b>ACTIVITY 1. Let's begin! You have 5 minutes to assign an expert role to each member of your group.</b></p> </div> <p>For example: María → Expert group 1</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <div style="background-color: #f0f0f0; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p><b>ACTIVITY 2. Time to go! Gather with your EXPERTS group around the station. You have 10 minutes to:</b></p> </div> <p>a) Name each element in English. Use the dictionary if needed. [5 min]</p> <p><b>ELEMENT ONE:</b> _____</p> <p><b>ELEMENT TWO:</b> _____</p> <p>b) Guess their role in the story. Think about possible places and characters. [5 min]</p> <p><b>ELEMENT ONE:</b> _____</p> <p><b>ELEMENT TWO:</b> _____</p> <div style="background-color: #f0f0f0; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p><b>ACTIVITY 3. Time to come back! Gather with your PUZZLE group again. You have 20 minutes to complete these tasks:</b></p> </div> <p>a) What elements did you see? Explain what they were and write their names in English. [5 min]</p> <p><b>EXPERTS GROUP 1:</b> _____</p> <p><b>EXPERTS GROUP 2:</b> _____</p> <p><b>EXPERTS GROUP 3:</b> _____</p> <p><b>EXPERTS GROUP 4:</b> _____</p> <p>b) Share with the group what you discussed with the Experts group. Organize speaking turns and listen to each other's conclusions. [10 min]</p> <p>c) Then, create a final prediction about the story's elements. Think about possible settings, characters, problems and solutions. [5 min]</p> <p><b>FINAL PREDICTION:</b> _____</p> <hr/> <hr/>

**Pre-reading activities 2: Original Soundtrack (OST) and Teaser Trail**

**RESOURCES:**

- Original Soundtrack of “Piper” (2016) by Adrian Belew:
  - Spotify: <https://open.spotify.com/track/0KY2c5ePxO3TgZLS0YXXJG?si=e04be29ae2734b17>
  - YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXfzYmsWQoQ>
- Tease Trailer of “Piper” (2016) by Pixar Animation Studios.
  - YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z75UjqXqlh8>
- Students’ handout.

**ACTIVITIES:** necessary for activities 4, 5, and 6 of students’ handouts.

**KEY INFORMATION**  
ACTIVITY 4.



*Did you know...?*

- Music is used to express emotions or events. Fast instruments express action. Grim sounds fear 😨, and high-pitched sounds happiness 😊.
- Challenge extended! Can you guess what the story is about only with the music?

**ACTIVITY 4. Let's listen!** You are going to listen to the Original Soundtrack of “Piper” twice. Complete task A after the first listening, and task B after the second.

**Task A) Choose 5 words from the list to describe the music. There's no right answer! Choose the words you think are best. [10 min]**

**Words:**

1. Frolic (- happy)	6. Shore (- beach line)
2. To chill (- to scare)	7. To engulf (- to cover)
3. To bury (- hide in the ground)	8. To flit (- to fly)
4. Strange (- weird)	9. Adventurous (- brave)
5. Critter (- creature)	10. Rumble (- low sound)

**Task B) Compare your ideas with a partner and write their words. Did you choose the same words? Why or why not? [15 min]**

**HOW TO DISCUSS**



*Remember that-*

- Listening is as important as speaking. Be patient and let your classmates talk.
- To organize the discussion, you must raise your hand.

**ACTIVITY 5. Let's gather!** Discuss with the class and share your ideas. Write down important conclusions. We have 15 minutes!

**KEY INFORMATION**  
ACTIVITY 6.

- Challenge completed? Did you guess what the story is about only with the music? Write your ideas!
- Remember! There's no right answer. Write what makes sense to you. 😊

**ACTIVITY 6. Let's write!** After discussing with the class, do your final prediction about the story plot. You have 10 minutes!

**Table 2**  
*Resources and Materials. While-reading activities 1 and 2*

<b>RESOURCES AND MATERIALS: WHILE-READING ACTIVITIES</b>	
<b>While-reading activities 1: Silent reading of the adapted S-Story</b>	
<p><b>RESOURCES:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Original Soundtrack of «Piper» (2016) by Adrian Belew.</li> <li>• Brainstorm live survey tool or website for schools (e.g., mentimeter).               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mentimeter app: <a href="https://www.mentimeter.com/app/">https://www.mentimeter.com/app/</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Adapted S-Story <i>Piper</i> (Madrid Tribano, 2021).               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bookcreator: <a href="https://read.bookcreator.com/EovP04GRb7cSn5waUnNkR7Qc9Is1/L2wW6nE7R8upy5nxC-0mFQ">https://read.bookcreator.com/EovP04GRb7cSn5waUnNkR7Qc9Is1/L2wW6nE7R8upy5nxC-0mFQ</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Students' handout.</li> </ul> <p><b>ACTIVITIES:</b> necessary for activity 7 of students' handout.</p>	
<b>While-reading activities 2: Group reading and storytelling of the adapted S-Story</b>	
<p><b>RESOURCES:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Original Soundtrack of «Piper» (2016) by Adrian Belew.</li> <li>• Adapted S-Story <i>Piper</i> (Madrid Tribano, 2021).</li> <li>• Students' handout.</li> </ul> <p><b>ACTIVITIES:</b> no activities are needed.</p>	

Table 3

Resources and Materials. Post-reading activities 1 and 2

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS: POST-READING ACTIVITIES	
<b>Post-reading activities 1: Watching the SS-Movie</b>	
<b>RESOURCES:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Silent Short Movie of «Piper» (2016) by Pixar Animation Studios.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Disney Plus+: <a href="https://www.disneyplus.com/es-es/movies/piper/3j2l1XeKBRCu">https://www.disneyplus.com/es-es/movies/piper/3j2l1XeKBRCu</a></li></ul></li><li>• Students' handout.</li></ul>	
<b>ACTIVITIES:</b> necessary for activity 8 of students' handout.	
	
<b>Post-reading activities 2: Adapting the S-Story</b>	
<b>RESOURCES:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students' handout.</li><li>• Students' class notebooks.</li></ul>	
<b>ACTIVITIES:</b> necessary for activities 9 and 10 of students' handout.	

**ACTIVITY 9. Let's write! Complete the different tasks before writing your story. You have 20 minutes!**

**HOW TO THINK**



We're learning to...  
What I'm looking for is...

- This strategy guides our **learning goal** and **results**.
- First, think about your **learning goal**: *What story did you choose?*
- Second, think about your **results**: *What do you need to include in your story?*

a) Choose one of these two options! [10 min]

**Rewrite the story from a character's perspective:**

- ✓ Write the same story but change the main character.
- ✓ Character ideas: the mother, the hermit crabs, the flock, etc.
- ✓ Change the perspective of the story: *who* is witnessing the story?

**Adapt the script and create a theatre play:**

- ✓ Write the same story but using dialogues.
- ✓ Think about the characters of your theater play.
- ✓ Change the time of the story: dialogues use present tenses!

b) Reflect about your **learning goals** and **results**: [10 min]

<b>We're learning to...</b>	<b>What I'm looking for is...</b>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

**ACTIVITY 10. Let's write! Write the story/script, thinking about your learning goals and results. You have 50 minutes!**

**KEY INFORMATION**

**ACTIVITY 10.**

**Plan your writing!**

- Decide the most important elements of your story.

**Use your own words!**

- Don't use the dictionary too much.
- Use different words to say the same. Eg: bird = small animal that can fly.

a) **Plan your writing:** think about characters, settings, events, etc. [10 min]

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

b) **Use your notebook to write the story/script.** [40 min]

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

From a learning perspective, students generally perceive literacy as one of the most challenging skills to develop in their native and foreign languages. Unlike oral skills, reading and writing require explicit instruction on the elements and features to decode and encode texts. And although the learning process requires explicit teaching practice, its promotion requires the motivation and commitment of students to reading and writing, i.e., their autonomous participation in the literacy process.

The use of materials near to students' reality, such as short stories and short movies, attempts to make them visible, accessible, and motivating, hence strengthening the commitment of students to reading and other forms of narration. Additionally, we have seen how short movies and short stories facilitate curriculum integration and envision language learning as a vehicle for communication. Thus, the objectives of foreign language teaching are broadened to not only linguistic aspects but also cultural, emotional, and cognitive ones.

On the other hand, teaching visualization strategies manages to successfully model the reading process in students, thus providing them with techniques that improve their reading comprehension. Thanks to the application of the Dual Coding Theory for verbal and non-verbal languages, we can integrate various materials into our curricular designs that are committed to creating referential associations between the two, thus enhancing the memory and retention of our students.

Lastly, and as exposed in the proposal, the integration of short stories with short films through the Visualization Strategy allows for the inclusion of different learning styles, cooperative methodologies, autonomous learning, and thinking strategies. Additionally, the reading promotion cycle ends with the production of texts. Students move from decoding texts to encoding them, from understanding to developing them, and, ultimately, from being readers to become writers.

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