

## Foster Students' Creative Thinking in English Reading Teaching in Senior High School

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**Abstract:** *The English Curriculum Standard for General Senior High School* (2017 Edition) clearly illustrated the cultivation of thinking quality as one of the important goals of English reading teaching in senior high school. As we all know, creative thinking quality is the highest level of all the qualities. However, previous English reading teaching methods and patterns can't meet students' creative thinking developing requirements. Based on this situation, this paper's content mainly includes: (1) What's problem in previous English reading teaching? (2) What is the creative thinking quality? (3) How to cultivate students' creative thinking in English reading teaching? This paper takes *The Million Pound Note* reading materials as an example to explore how to design appropriate activity and question chains in the teaching of English reading in senior high school to improve the students' creative thinking quality.

**Keywords:** Creative Thinking quality; Senior high school; English reading teaching

### I. Research gap

As we all know, creative thinking ability plays a key role in personal happiness, national innovation development and human social progress. In addition, senior high school students are the critical period for the developing of creative thinking quality. Governments all over the world pay great attention to the cultivation of students' creative thinking ability. Creative thinking ability has become an important part of students' development of core literacy in many countries.

Many problems, however, remain unsolved in this respect. Reading material is an integral part of English teaching in developing students' creative thinking quality in senior high school. While the focus of reading teaching is off-track in ordinary teaching work. When it comes to reading teaching in senior high school, because of the pressure of college entrance examination to university, many teachers tend to focus their reading teaching on language knowledge, ignoring the critical importance of developing students' high level thinking quality. A common phenomenon is that many teachers seldom take reading classes in open class. When asked why, they answer there is nothing new in reading teaching. It means that most teachers think reading method or pattern is relatively fixed, leading they don't want to try more effect. Reading teaching pattern includes pre-reading, while-reading and post reading. Pre-reading is always related to some background information introduction (brainstorm and questions), aiming to arouse students' learning interests and existing schema cognition about the topic. While-reading will be designed into fast-reading and careful-reading. The regular step

is asking students to read for main idea in fast-reading and to find some specific information about the reading passage. Before closing the class, teacher is bound to pose a discussion question, then students try to express their views on this question, guiding students to have a deeper understanding about the theme.

As for classroom questioning, relating reading activities questions are superficial. The reason is that most teachers don't do in-depth analysis of the text. Under the circumstances, a lot of factual questions whose answers can be found from the passage directly exist throughout the class. Lacking of opening questions greatly narrows the students' thinking space and causes students' thinking level stays in the low level.

What's worse, students' reading strategies are also fixed, mainly including skimming, scanning and careful reading, which results from teacher neglect the stylistic features and the theme context. In a word, all the above is difficult to satisfy senior high school students' curiosity and creative thinking quality developing.

*The English Curriculum Standard for General Senior High School (2017 Edition)* highlights the thinking quality. The "Standards for Full-time Compulsory Education and English Curriculum in General Senior Secondary Schools" proposes to develop students' intelligence (such as observation, memory, thinking ability, expression ability, creativity, etc.). It is clearly stated that students' creativity should be developed in English teaching. The basic concept of English education in the "Standards" proposes: to enable them (middle school students) to develop the ability to use the language comprehensively in the learning process to improve humanistic literacy, enhance practical ability, and cultivate the spirit of innovation.

In the 1920s, Tao Xingzhi proposed and implemented "creation education", and in the "Creation Declaration", he called for cultivating creativity from an early age and carrying out experimental research on "creation education" at different levels in several regions. Since the 1980s, many domestic experts and scholars have raised the issue of creativity cultivation, such as Lin Chongde's research on the cultivation of the creative quality of primary school students' mathematical thinking Zhang Rong and Wan Yunying's discussion on the creative thinking training of primary and secondary school students Zhang Jie's experimental research on the cultivation of creativity in young children.

The most widely used in the field of creative thinking research and evaluation is the portrayal of creative thinking by American psychologist Guilford (2006), who uses factor analysis to propose a three-dimensional model of the structure of the intellect (SOI), which divides intelligence into 180 components and forms a complete thinking process of "input (content) → operation → output (product)". In his view, the most intimately related to creative thinking in this intellectual structure is divergent thinking and transformation (Guilford, 2006, p32-33). It means that students can analyze problems from different angles, different ranges, not stick to the rules. What's more, students abandon the original fixed mode of thinking, transform in multiple directions, and produce a variety of methods of behaviors.

So, creative thinking in this paper is that students can analyze problems by divergent thinking, then transform their ideas into new, personal and creative one, whose process is based on teachers' deep understanding about the reading passage.

## II. Reading teaching design

To achieve above teaching objectives, teacher should definitely follow the following three aspects and relative rules when they are having a teaching design.

At first, that teacher has to fully understand the reading text is foundation, which contains three levels and five angles to constructure the thematic meaning of the text.

What	Theme and content	What did the author write?(understanding)
Why	Theme and author	Why did the author write this passage?(inferencing)

How	Style and language	How did the author write this passage?(analyzing)
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It is known to us, language knowledge is tangible, but students' thinking quality is intangible. So, question is the key part to guide students to develop distinctive level thinking quality. Good design should start from a focus question to different levels subquestions, even the lower subquestions, improving the directivity, presupposition, hierarchy and integrity of the questions. Robert Mazzano (2014) States: "How to make teaching attractive to students is something that teachers should consider. The most important question and the most effective strategy is to focus on asking questions to carry out instructional design. Students are always ready for questions in class, leading them actively to participate in teaching activities. "

English Learning Activities refers to the fact that under the guidance of thematic significance, students can promote the learning of their own language knowledge, the development of language skills, the understanding of cultural connotations, the development of pluralistic thinking, the judgment of value orientation and the application of learning strategies in the process of analyzing and interpreting problems through a series of comprehensive, related and practical English learning activities, which mainly includes three levels activity:

Level1	Learning and understanding	Perception and attention, acquisition and combining, generalization and intergration
Level2	Practice and application	Description and interpretation, analysis and judgment, internalization and application
Level3	Migration and innovation	Reasoning and argumentation, criticism and evaluation, imagination and innovation

Based on above, teacher construct the target reading material thematic meaning.

In order to develop students' creative thinking quality, appropriate learning activity and time should be assigned to students. Activity in class is the practical condition. The English learning activity concept refers to the students' creative thinking quality development through learning and understanding, practice and application, transfer and innovation under the guidance of the meaning of the theme.

### III. An example of reading teaching design

To illustrate the reading teaching design to develop students' distinctive levels thinking quality, I take *The Million Pound Bank Note* from *Unit5 The Value of Money, Senior High School English 2019 Edition Compulsory 3* as an example.

#### 3.1 Analyze the content characteristics

First of all, teacher fully analyze the reading context from three aspects: what, why and how.

What: A pair of wealthy brothers have a bet on a bank cheque, whose face value is a million pounds, to see if a poor man could survive a month only with this huge cheque. Henry Adam, who leads a wandering life in poverty in London street, was chosen by them to be the target of the bet.

Why: The author Mark Twain outlines the ugliness of different characters in front of the million pounds bank note, exposes the cruel reality of money in capitalist society, and inspires students to think deeply about the value of money and establish correct money values.

How: the genre is a play which is adapted from Mark Twain's novel *The Million Pound Note*. The elements of the play concludes title, scene, narration, stage instruction, character and lines of dialogue. Different characters' sentences reflects respective personality and emotion, most of them have implicit information.

According to above analysis, the thematic meaning is that students can correctly understand the value of money and form the correct value of money.

Based on the theme context of this unit: the value of money. After fully understanding and interpreting the text, determining the teaching objective of this lesson is to inspire students to think about the value of money, so as to establish a correct view of money. From this point of view, the relevant activities are designed to the matched level. Among them, the activities of learning and understanding are: understanding the constituent elements of play and using story-mountain to help students sort out the storyline. Secondly, applying practical activity designed to guide students to analyze the characters' characteristics and emotional attitudes through storylines and character lines, and allowing students to further experience the inner world of characters through role played by students. Thirdly, the innovative activities are discussion and share, students discuss the money value of the characters in the story, then share their own view of money, guiding students to modify and establish their own view of money in this process. The questions in the classroom are in-depth and guide students to think step by step.

### 3.2 The analysis of the genre

Secondly, analyzing the play characteristics benefits students' language learning and pedagogical meaning.

The plot is highly condensed. High concentration is an essential feature of play. A play cannot be as lengthy as a novel, nor its time and space change can it be as free as prose. It requires a high degree of concentration of characters, plots, and scenes. A small play has to show the big world. The play uses the terms "act" and "scene" to represent paragraphs and plots. "Act" refers to a large passage in the development of the plot. "One act" consists of several scenes, and "one scene" refers to the plot separated by the space or time in which the scene occurs. The play generally requires that the length should not be too long, the characters should not be too many, and the scenes should not be too converted.

Contradictions and conflicts are sharp and prominent. All kinds of literature require the expression of social contradictions and conflicts, and play has to reflect contradictions and conflicts in limited space and time, so it is sharp and more prominent. Because dramatic literature is produced to reflect the contradictions and conflicts in real life in a concentrated way, it is said that there is no play without the contradictions and conflicts. The contradictions and conflicts of the script are roughly divided into four parts: beginning, development, climax and ending. The contradiction and conflict at the beginning attracts the audience, and the contradiction and conflict in the climax part is the most gripping that attracts the audience the most.

The lines can fully show character's personality. The language of the play mainly includes two aspects: lines and stage instructions. Lines are what the characters in the play say, including dialogue, monologue, and narration. The monologue is what the characters in the play say when they express their personal feelings and wishes alone. Narration is something that a character in the play says to the audience from the sidelines. The play mainly promotes the development of the plot through lines and shows the personal characteristics of the characters. Therefore, the lines should fully express the character, identity, thoughts and emotions of the characters. Therefore, lines should be concise and clear, colloquial and suitable for stage performances. Stage instruction is an indispensable part of the play, including the character table in the play, the time, place, costume, props, unexplained and character expressions, actions, etc. These explanations have a certain effect on portraying the characteristics of the character and pushing the development of the plot. It must be concise and clear. The content of this part generally appears in the beginning, middle and end of each act or scene.

### 3.3 The practice of play reading teaching

*The Million Bank Note* is an adaptation of Mark Twain's novel *A million pounds*. Mark Twain, 1835-1910, whose original name is Samuel Langhorne, a famous American Famous writer and elocutionist. Mark Twain is his pen name, originally used by the Mississippi River sailors as a term for the depth of the water measured on the waterway. When Mark Twain was 12 years old, he had to drop out of school due to the death of his father. Then, he worked as a navigator, miner, and journalist on the Mississippi River, he

gradually wrote interesting novels and began his career as a writer. *A million pounds* is one of his representative works. Mark Twain was the founder of critical realism literature, and wrote a large number of works in his lifetime, including novels, plays, essays, and poetry. In terms of content, his work criticizes irrational phenomena or the ugliness of human nature, expressing the strong sense of justice and concern for ordinary .Mark Twain worked as a typesetter and sailor. Stylistically, both experts and the general reader agree that humor and satire are characteristic of his writing. He experienced the development of the United States from early capitalism to developed capitalism, and his ideas and creations also appeared as brisk laughter to pungent irony, and later became even more intense.

Knowing the author and the background of the times can better grasp the attack and conflict, so I assign students a pre-study homework before class: search for relevant materials online and complete the author information form (see table below):

Mark Twain

Nationality	<i>America</i>
Time(birth to death)	<i>1853-1910</i>
Family background	<i>Born in a poor family in rural Florida, he has a total of 7 siblings, and his father is a local lawyer with a meager income.</i>
Events before starting writing	<i>Dropping out, working in a factory, avigator, typesetter</i>
Other information	<i>The Mark Twain Humor Award is named after him...</i>

(Note: The italic part is the content that students are required to fill in)

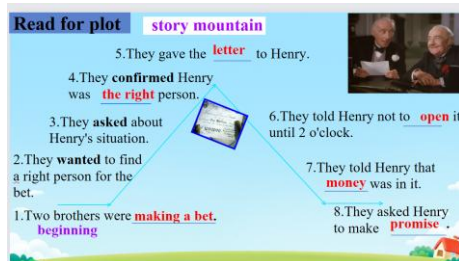
The first four items in the table are closed-entry questions. Because the author's relevant information is not mentioned in *Reading and Thinking* part, according to the requirements of text learning, it needs to be supplemented before class. The last item in the form is an open-ended question that students can complete according to their own interests. Given that the author's upbringing had a profound impact on his later creations, the reading articles in this section do not give relevant author information. Therefore, I deliberately included the relevant practices that occurred before Mark Twain wrote in the table. From the information gathered, students learn that Mark Twain's creative content, style and themes are inseparable from the background of the era in which he lived and the experience of his upbringing. In this way, the narrowing of the information gap is conducive to students grasping the contradictions and conflicts of this article.

### 3.4 Comb the plot of the story

The play discourses show the protagonist's activities and conflicts through plot development. This play tells the story of an adventure in London by a young American man, Henry Adams. Henry came to London, England, penniless due to an accident. Henry went to American consulate for help, but failed. Hungry Henry wandered in the streets. At this time, they were called into their house by the rich brothers who were betting on a million pound bank note. In the process of the rich brothers inquiring about his situation, Henry hopes to seek a job from them. However, they did not sympathize with Henry's misfortune, and said it's an davantage and it's lucky. Because their focus is on finding the right object for their bet in order to settle their arguments. At this point, the story reaches its climax, when angry Henry is about to go away when he is stopped by the rich brothers who give Henry an envelope containing millions of pounds. Henry was curious at first, and after knowing the money inside, he said firmly: I don't want you charity, i just want a job that earns an honest income. But the rich brothers firmly demanded a letter from Henry's men and signaled to the server to let him go.

In this part, I guide students to use the visual tool story mountain to sort out the storyline, which is conducive to exploring the logical relationship between the plots and grasping the development and changes of

the plot. To do this, the teacher asks students to read the full text carefully and complete the fill-in-the-blank task of Story Mountain.



By completing story mountain, students better understand the storyline and deepen their understanding of the character characteristics.

Next, I lead the students to analyze the protagonist's situation, personality and psychological characteristics from multiple angles by appreciating the storyline and the specific lines of the characters. Analyze the situation of the characters from the condensed plot. Dramatic plot is one of the constituent factors of play. This article shows from Henry's account that Accident took him to London, England. Guide students through accident's related fill-in-the-blank exercises to analyze Henry's situations from multiple angles. After the students fill in the blanks, the teacher guide students to summarize: so, Henry came to London by accident. What words can you use to describe Henry? to train students in the fluency of divergent thinking. Firstly, it is easy to know that Henry is a foreigner stranger. Secondly, Henry came to London by accident, so he did no preparation and no job in London. Also, he left his family and relatives suddenly, which makes him homeless and lonely. This link is the beginning of the story and the starting point of the dramatic contradiction. Valued because of this. I introduced it in detail through Henry's lines.

After analyzing above content, teacher guide students to have a summary: in a word, Henry is in a terrible situation. Then, students think about: How did Henry deal with this situation, positively or negatively? Who can offer him help? Where should he go? By asking questions about different subject objects, students are stimulated to think flexibly and novelly.

Then, we can go to another scene that is American consulate and see what happen to Henry there. In this part, teacher provide a video for students. After enjoying it, students answer the following questions: What's the staff's attitude to Henry? Did the staff believe in Henry's good quality? What did the staff believe in? What comes first in the consulate staff's eyes? Then switch to the scene to Henry meets the rich man, first let the students peruse this part, and then guide the students to pay attention to the inner qualities of the different characters. I ask students: Did the rich brothers really want to help him? What's the rich brothers' purpose? What's the function of money in the rich brothers' eyes? The dialogue between Henry and rich brothers in the play is more detailed to understand Henry's previous work and inner good quality. By asking some informative, simple questions: What did Henry ask for? How much money did Henry have? Was Henry happy or willing to accept the one million bank note? Discuss after answering above questions. What kind of person is Henry? Inspire students' convergent thinking to summarize Henry's personal characteristics from different aspects: poor but honest and hard-working.

Migration innovation activities include group discussion about the value of money in different characters' eyes? Then, teacher ask students to share their own value of money. At last, all the class discuss together and form the correct value of money.

The detailed teaching steps are following:

Step1: Lead-in

Free talk: If you were given one million pounds, what would you do?

Step2:Read for genre,aiming to guide students to master the elements of the play.

Step3:Read for character,aiming to guide students to figure out the relationship between main characters.

Step4:Read for plot,aiming to guide students to grasp the characters' personality and emotion.

Step5:Role-play,aiming to guide students to further experience the inner world of characters .

Step6:Think and share,aiming to guide students to think deeply about the value of money,and establish their own value of money.

#### IV. Summary

Reading is an important vehicle for the cultivation of creative thinking. Teachers should make full use of their specific context to interpret the text as a whole, and then design teaching activities and classroom questions in depth to guide students to analyze and solve problems from multiple perspective.Finally, we must pay attention to guiding students to take the value behind the discourse.Reasoning and argumentation to or author attitudes, criticism and evaluation of author views point, carry out diversified thinking, and promote the transformation and creativity thinking ability.

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