

## ADVANTAGES OF USING COMICS PEDAGOGY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING-A PRACTICAL APPROACH

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### ABSTRACT

*The communicative significance and educational function of comics have made a significant impact in English Language Teaching. Comics are popularly perceived as a form of visual narrative drawn either in a realistic or cartoony style in a sequential panel. They communicate both verbally and non-verbally through pictorial representation, speech balloons, special characters and trigger higher order thinking skills of the reader. Language skills such as coherence, information transfer, creative writing, reading and speaking can be enhanced by using comics as a pedagogical tool. The present paper discusses the use of different comics-tools such as Fill in the blank, Jigsaw, Sequencing, Predictions and Information transfer and how they can be beneficial in a English Language class. These tools when used in teaching methodology have shown advantages such as enabling the learner learn English in small chunks, practise grammar, improve vocabulary skills, use figurative speech, comprehend mood and tone especially humor, exercise cognitive and meta-cognitive thinking and eventually gain a high level of linguistic competence. When these comics-tools were applied in an undergraduate class, the attention of the learners increased. However, when learners were found to dislike comics, they were either used after adequate interest was generated or not used at all. Moreover, teachers need to choose for their students the right comics with appropriate educational utility, be aware of the students' tastes and match the comic accordingly. This paper discusses how the above mentioned comics-tools were practically explored in undergraduate English classes; how they were beneficial in teaching grammar, vocabulary, creative writing, critical thinking and reading skills, and helped the learners improve their language competency in an enjoyable manner.*

**Key words:** English Language Teaching, Comics, Verbal and non-verbal, Higher Order Thinking skills, Coherence, Information transfer, Comics-tools

### INTRODUCTION

Teaching the English language in a classroom where we find students at different levels of proficiency and understanding, especially in an undergraduate classroom, is a complex phenomenon. The teacher has to always think out of the box to make the prescribed text book more interesting and productive.

The undergraduate student would have learnt English in school for at least ten years. However, when they come to the undergraduate English Language class, most of the students lack confidence in speaking skills, effective use of grammar and vocabulary and writing skills. With the exception of a handful of students, they need considerable grammatical inputs in using verbs, verb forms and tenses, use of phrasal verbs, idioms and figurative language and reading comprehension (Liu 2004, Nugroho 2017). Yet they do not realize the need to re-learn grammar, vocabulary and appropriate language expressions. Thus it becomes a challenge for the undergraduate English teacher not only to make the students overcome regional influence of an unacceptable variety of English but also understand, learn and use Standard English practically.

Comics are popularly perceived as a form of visual narrative and play an effective role in the learner-centered (Graham, 2011) teaching methodology as they not only act as a base for fun learning but also help the learners understand and motivate to use the language in their daily conversation. They prove to be advantageous in a classroom as the teacher can use comic-strips according to the learners' needs and levels of proficiency, and still grab the attention of all the learners.

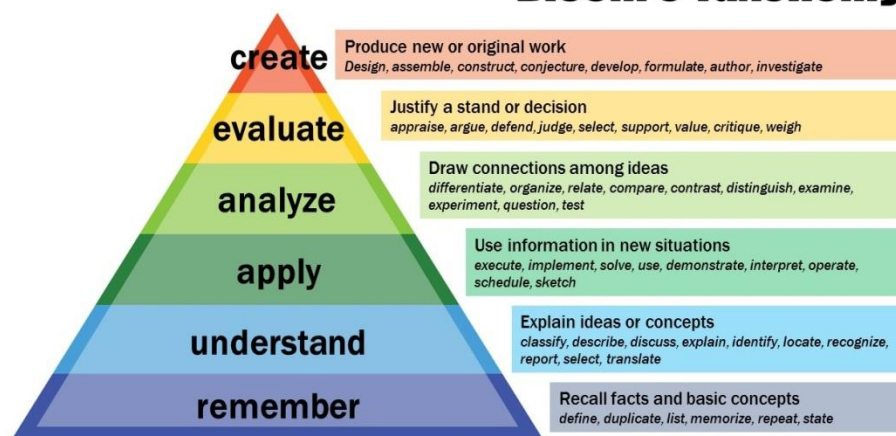
## SIGNIFICANCE

There are many advantages in using comic-tools approach (Whiting, 2016) in classroom activities. It helps to build vocabulary as the students can learn verbal expressions from the context and use them in their daily conversation. The learners learn the grammar with ease as they learn it covertly without paying much attention to the rules thus enhancing their speaking skills. Thus grammar can be taught interestingly using comic-tools in classroom. They also help the learners to use figurative expressions in their daily language. It improves their imaginative, logical and reasoning skills when the teacher engages the student in storytelling. Moreover comics are a useful source of pleasure reading to practice reading skills. Enjoyable comics can improve the mood and attitude of learners, which in turn improves their ability to learn. Comics help in enhancing and enriching the students' language skills, enable them to be creative, promote reading and vocabulary skills and gain a high level of linguistic competence.

## BACKGROUND

The present study followed the educational goals and principles (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956) in imparting cognitive and meta-cognitive skills through comics. The higher order thinking skills were the main focus in using comics. Graphic novels, comic books, magazines, teen romances serve better in vocabulary acquisition (Krashen 1993), reading skills and eventually leading to good writing skills. The undergraduate English textbook served as a basic guideline in choosing and designing the tasks based on comics to improve the learners' critical and analytical skills, evaluative and creative skills.

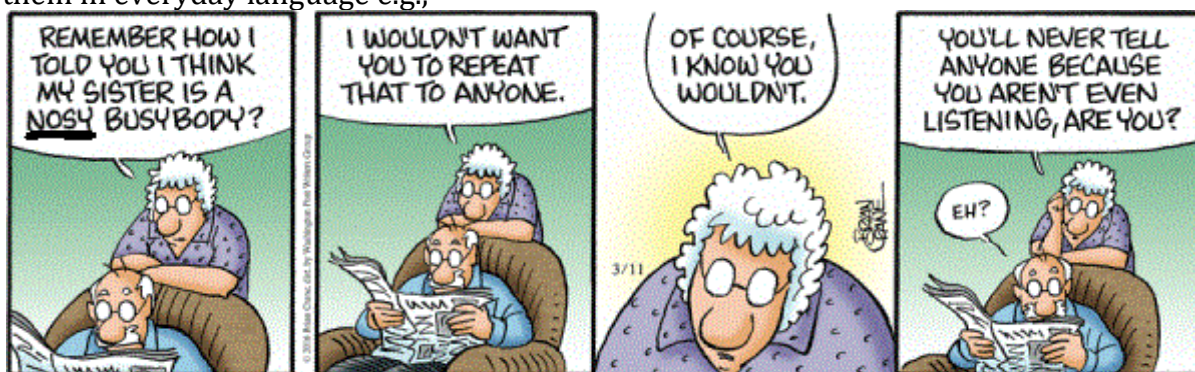
## Bloom's Taxonomy



## METHODOLOGY USED IN THE STUDY

Comics strips were used with the following objectives:

- Vocabulary building:** To help the learners remember the vocabulary and use them in everyday language e.g.,



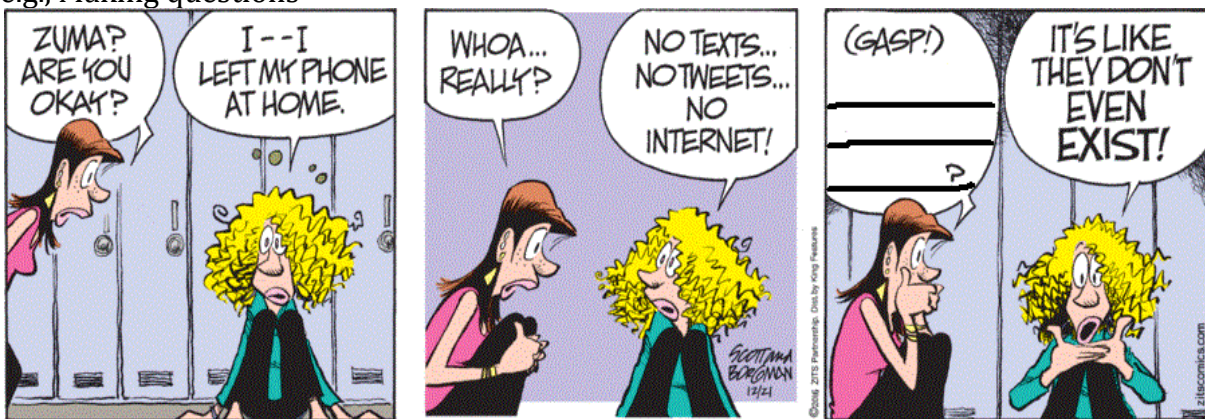


Meaning of nosy:- 'showing too much curiosity in other peoples affair.' The teacher can ask the learners to make few more sentences with the word 'nosy'.

- b. **Grammar:** To learn using tenses correctly, make questions and learn sentence structure –simple to complex  
e.g., Tenses



e.g., Making questions



- c. **Sequencing :** To develop coherence which in turn develops creative writing skills  
e.g.,



A

B

C

- d. **Creative Writing and Story telling:** To develop metacognitive skills, self-confidence and critical thinking skills. Comic strips with blank speech balloons were

given to the students to fill them up with ideas and expressions., e.g.,



### The study was designed as:

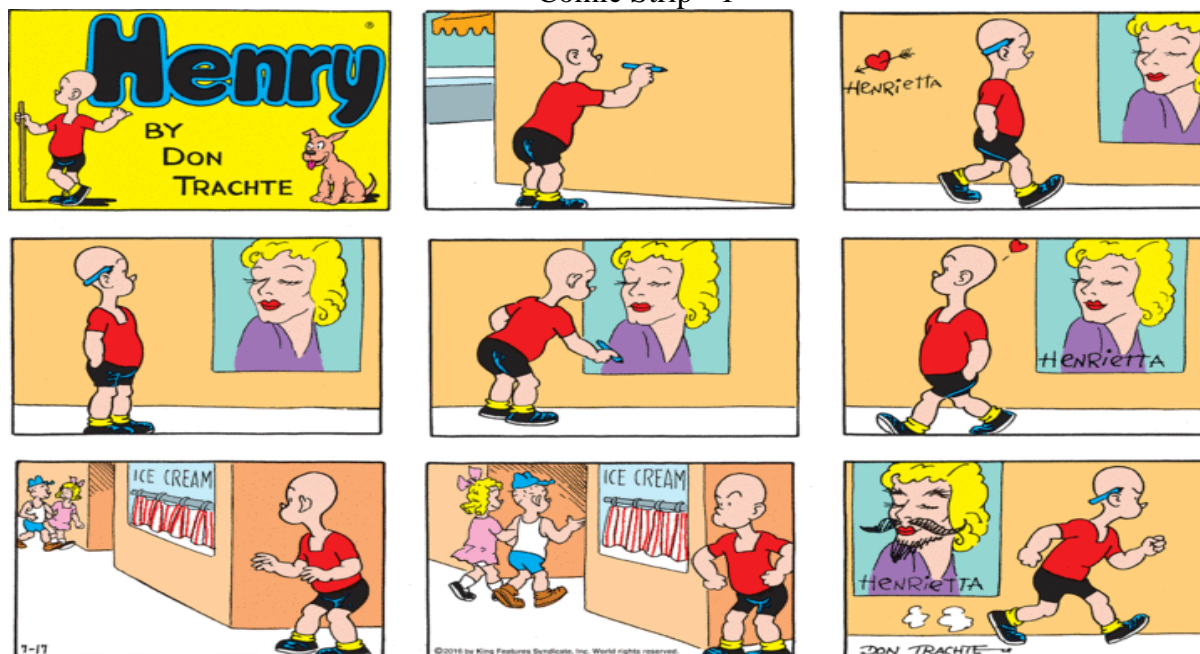
Two classes per week out of five assigned to comics-tools approach for a duration of one month. Alternatively, 8-10 hours in total. The classes were conducted in the following manner:

**Beginning:** The students of undergraduate English class (approximately 90 girls) were asked to create and tell a story in the class by adding one sentence each. This was to check their grammatical knowledge (especially tenses), vocabulary and coherence. Later they were asked to write down the story they had created in the class. They were also asked to mention on the paper how many years they had studied English as a formal subject.

Then a small introduction about comics was given by the teacher. When asked, most of the students said they liked comics and also gave a few examples of cartoons and comical characters. The smart TV in the class was used to show some comic characters at random. This was to understand the taste of the learners. (Alternatively, LCD projector or Smart phones can also be used).

Then they were shown a comic strip asked to describe it, e.g.

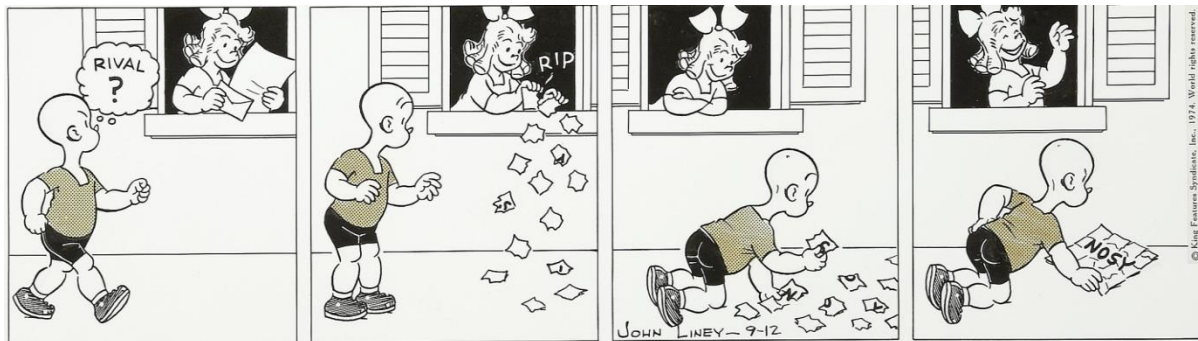
Comic Strip - 1



**Task 1:** The students were shown one comic strip of *Henry* and asked to frame sentences and describe the pictures in their own words orally. They were guided through the vocabulary and formation of sentences. They were asked to write down all the sentences afterwards and then read them out.

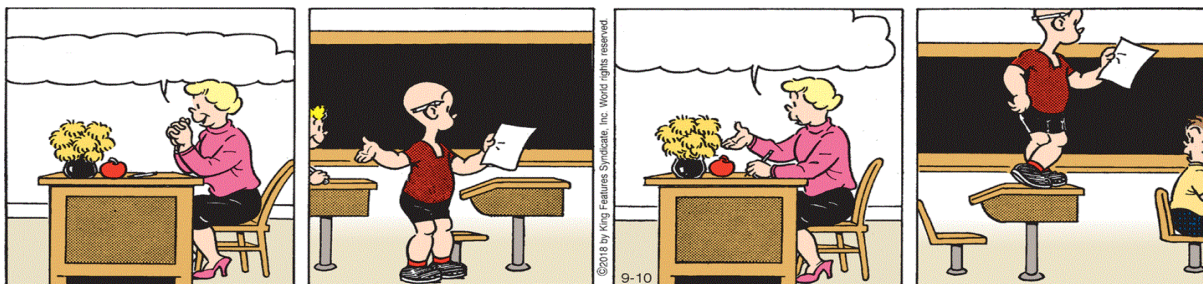


## Comic strip -2



**Task 2:** The students were shown 6 comic strips of *Henry* and asked to write a story on their own, in order to encourage their creative writing skills. Each student was asked to read aloud what she had written. In the process the teacher corrected any grammatical errors which the student noted down.

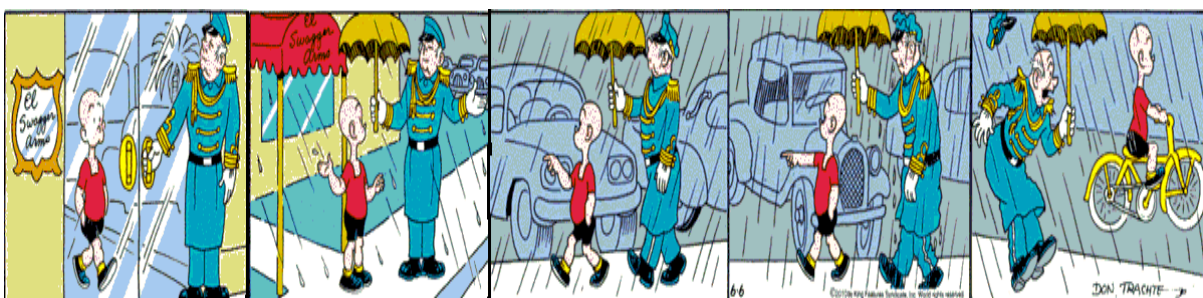
## Comic Strip -3



## Comic Strip -4



## Comic Strip -5





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DON TRACHTE 2-28

A four-panel comic strip. Panel 1: A boy walks under a hot sun, sweating. Panel 2: He sees a sign for a 'BIRD-BATH \$10.00' and enters. Panel 3: He is watering a bird in a bath. Panel 4: He is being chased by birds after pouring water on the ground.

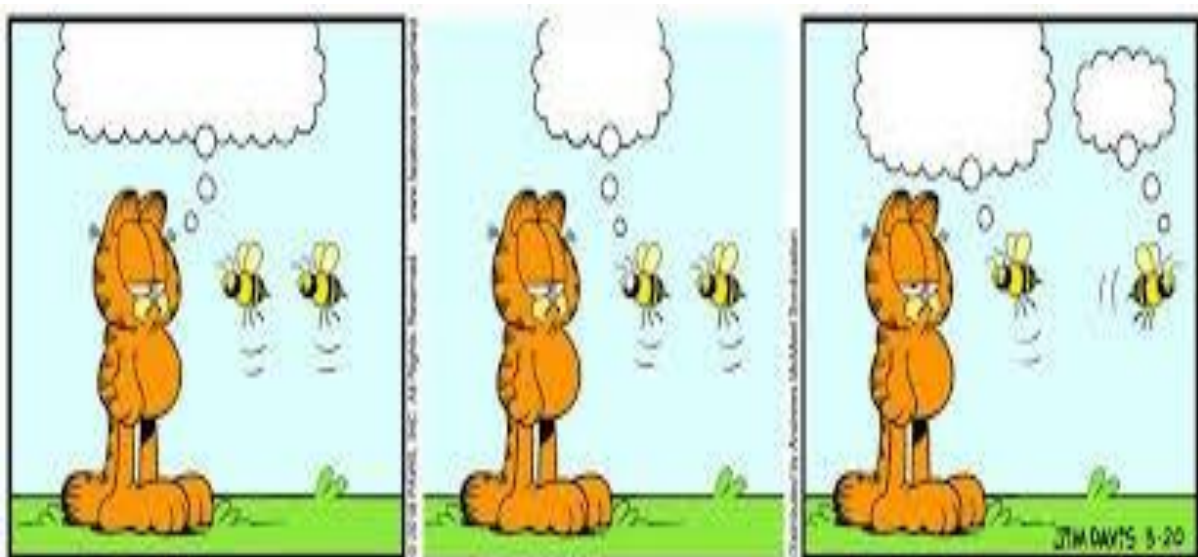
Comics Strips Jigsaw, Sequencing and Predictions from *Garfield*

<https://pramanaresearch.org/>

## Comic Strip – 9



## Comic Strip – 10



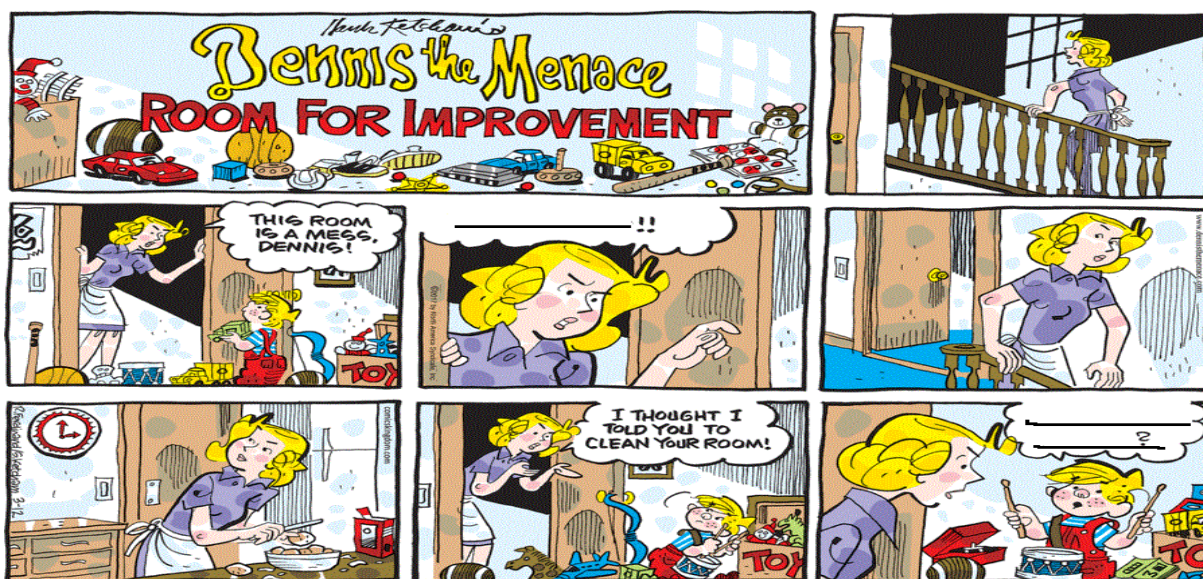
**Task 4:** In the next classes, the following were implemented:

Two or more Comics Strips from *Dennis the Menace* and *Calvin and Hobbes* with pre-designed tasks on Grammar. The speech balloons were either made blank or some words were omitted.

Framing sentences, framing questions, question tags, tense and aspect, verb forms were taught based on the action of the characters. (Here, animated cartoons can also be used based on the taste of the students.)



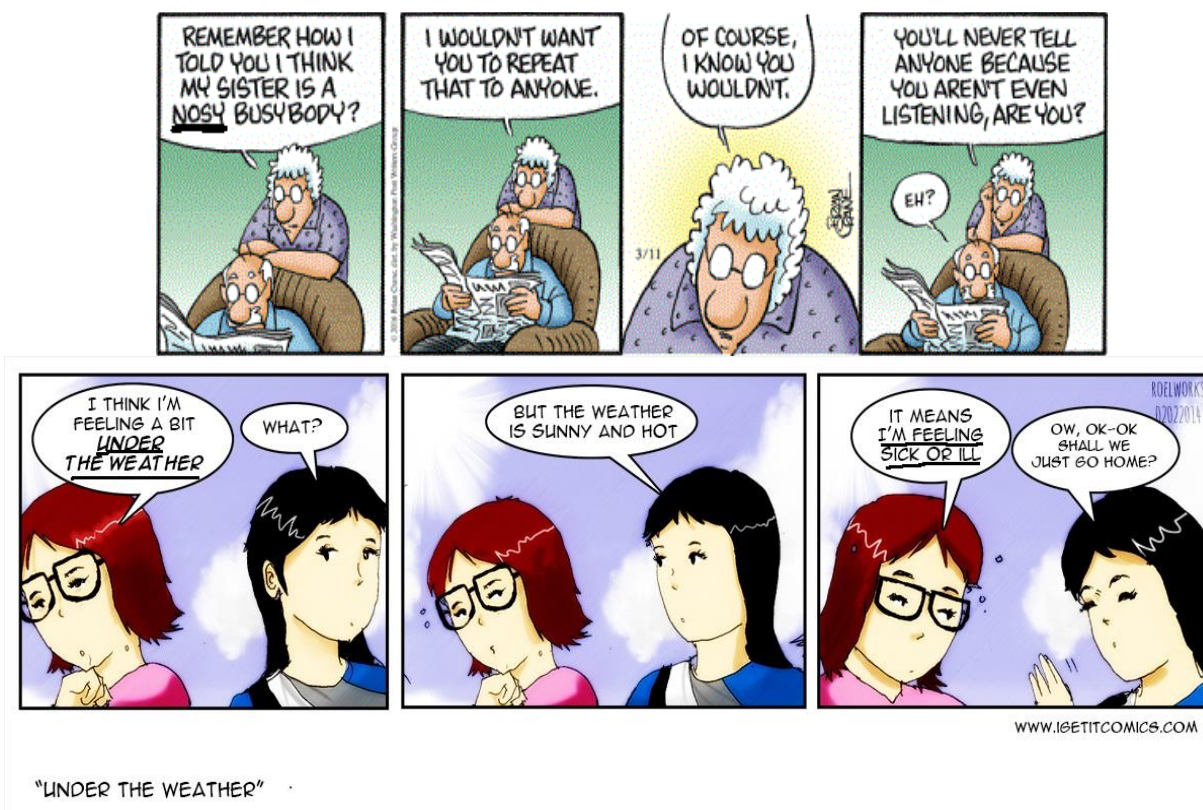
## Comic Strip-11



**Task5:** In the next three classes, vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, humor, irony and sarcasm were focused upon.

Four or more Comics Strips with pre-designed tasks on Vocabulary from simple literary meaning to figurative language were used. The students were asked to write down the meaning of underlined expressions from the pictures and also reflect upon the language tone and mood of the characters. Idioms, figures of speech and expressions were noted down by the students. They were also asked to create a comic-strip based on the same tone or mood.

## Comic Strips-12 and 13





**Test at the end:** The students were asked to write about their experience of using comics in language-learning class. They were also asked to write a story on any one comic character. Both the scripts at the beginning and at the end were evaluated on the basis of grammar, vocabulary, creativity and imagination, coherence, critical and analytical skills and reading skills.

### OBSERVATION

- a. Both the scripts (at the beginning and at the end of the study) of each student were compared. Satisfactory improvement in effort to develop language and communication abilities was noticed.
- b. The students were quite interested in the activities unlike when they learn from the textbook. This was a positive sign as they were self-motivated to perform the given tasks and therefore learnt better than other methods.
- c. They were speaking, reading, listening and writing while doing the tasks. They were also using their higher order thinking skills of analyzing, critical thinking, evaluating and creating.
- d. Participation in class was hundred percent. In an undergraduate English language class of ninety to hundred students usually about fifty to sixty percent of the students get motivated to perform the class activities. This was a significant development.
- e. Comic Strip -1: The students were able to learn past tense usage, critical thinking, vocabulary and punctuation.

Sample Answer:

*Henry was a great fan of Henriett as he was walking down the street he notices her poster and at first wrote her name on the wall with a heart symbol to show her how much he loved her. He stood there for quite some time admiring the poster. He doesn't find her name written on the poster so decides to write her name, but as Henry was going back he happens to see one of his friends along with his girlfriend going to an ice cream parlour and gets angry that Henriett doesn't accompany her anywhere. In anger he draws a beard and a moustache on the poster and runs away to his house in anger.*

The appropriateness of the answer was discussed in the class with the students so that they can be aware of the errors and correct them. The corrected answer by the class was as follows:

*Henry was a great fan of Henrietta. As he was walking down the street, he noticed her poster and wrote her name on the wall with a heart symbol showing her how much he loved her. He stood there for quite some time admiring the poster. He didn't find her name written on the poster so decided to write her name on it. But as he was leaving, he happened to see Henrietta going to an ice cream parlour with another boy. He got angry that Henrietta doesn't accompany him anywhere. So he drew a beard and a moustache on Henrietta's poster and went away to his house in anger.*

- f. Comic Strip -2: The students completed this task with less difficulty than the previous one. They learnt to transfer graphic information to verbal and learnt the use of present tense.

Sample answer:

- *Henry walks down the street.*
- *He sees his girl-friend tear a paper into pieces and throw it out saying RIP (Rest in peace).*
- *He becomes curious to know what was in the paper and starts arranging it.*
- *He gets angry when it reads 'Nosy' and finds his friend laughing.*

RIP was mis-interpreted as Rest in Peace. This was discussed in class.

g. Comic Strip 3: The students were able to frame a story based on the pictures in a sequential panel. They were guided in grammar and vocabulary as follows:

Sample answer:

*The teacher enters the class and asks Henry to read the lesson. When Henry starts reading she asks him to stand properly for which he stands on the bench and starts reading.*

Students were taught the difference between 'stand' and 'stand up'.

Comic Strip 4: Sample answer:

*Henry was reading a book 'Use your head'. When he sees his brother he gets an idea about using head so immediately he gets the cup and places on his brother's head and feels proud about it.*

Articles 'a' and 'the' were discussed. Transitive verbs and intransitive verbs were discussed with reference to the verb 'to place' which is bi-transitive.

Comic Strip 5: Sample answer:

*Once Henry goes to a restaurant and as he was coming out the security opens door for him as it was raining he holds an umbrella and tells him that he would take him till his vehicle so that he wouldn't get wet. The security asks him where his vehicle was for which he points his finger towards a car and just beside a beautiful car he had his cycle parked. The security is surprised and shocked.*

Correction:

*Once Henry went inside a restaurant and when he was coming out, the security opened the door for him. As it was raining, he held an umbrella and told him that he would take him till his vehicle so that he wouldn't get wet. As they reached the parking place, the security asked him where his vehicle was. Henry pointed his finger towards a car and then went off in a bicycle parked behind the car. The security was left surprised and shocked.*

More sample answers:

Comic Strip 7: *One evening Henry wanted to skate so he takes his skates and goes downstairs. He sits out and puts on his skates, by then a taxi arrives and a man as he comes down the stairs puts his leg on one of his skates and slips into the car. By the time Henry could say anything the driver closes the door and they leave the place. Henry runs after the car with one skates.*

Comic Strip 8: *It was a hot summer day. Henry was feeling very hot and he was sweating badly he observes three sparrows sitting on the wall in the heat and as he passes he sees a poster saying Bird-Bath \$ 10.00 and feeling pity for the birds he buys a can of water and pours water for it to drink looking at this other birds join.*

h. Comic Strip 9

The students completed this task and enjoyed arranging the jigsaw. They found it interesting and understood the cohesive links in a conversation.

i. Comic Strip 10: This task was difficult for the students as it involved creative thinking skills, more than analytical skills. They were unable to fill the speech balloons at first. But slowly came up with the following answers:

*Garfield – Hi! Bees how are you 'll after a long time*

*Garfield – Hi! Bees how are you all? After a long time!*

*1<sup>st</sup> Bee- I am fine Garfield, how about you. Yes it's been a long time.*

*Yes it's been a long time.*

*2<sup>nd</sup> Bee – ok you'll carry on. Bye. (You all)*



j. Comic Strip 11: This activity clearly showed the want of creative thinking skills among the students. However, they didn't give up and filled the speech balloons with the following:

*Mom- You better clean it up*

*Dennis- Sorry Mom, what did you say?*

k. The learners wanted more activities based on comics as they understood the need of improving their creative writing skills. They also felt they were able to use the language more effectively and improve their reading skills.

## CONCLUSION

The above study showed that comics-tools proved advantageous in generating considerable interest among the English Language learners to improve their reading, speaking and writing skills. The sense of humor in comics created an eagerness in them to try to use appropriate linguistic expressions by conscious effort. The irony, sarcasm, human folly and characterization in comics exposed them to a variety of expressions of thought, conversational skills and figurative language, which are learnt best in a context. Comics also gave them an essence of reading skills and how one can learn grammar and vocabulary through reading. The students understood the need to speak the language with sufficient vocabulary and expression to make their language sound beautiful and effective. However, some comics based tasks might prove rather difficult for the learners to complete which might demotivate them. The teacher needs to be careful to keep up the interest of the learner by selecting the right level of difficulty in the tasks and also keep in mind the taste of the learners.

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