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NEW LITERATURES IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

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There is an emergence of new varieties of English in many ESL countries, such as Malaysia, Singapore, India and many others. These varieties have undoubtedly given a new direction to teaching of English, hence this lesson plan. The activities here are designed around a literary text from an Asian cultural context. Their purpose is to awaken students' social and cultural awareness as well as to stimulate critical thinking.

LEVEL
TIME
BEFORE CLASS

Upper-intermediate and above

2-3 classes

You will need:

- Extracts from "Sara and the Wedding" (Raslan, Karim, 2001. *Heroes and Other Stories*. Singapore: Time Books International.)
- Handouts (OHP transparencies) with pre- and post-reading activities (see appendix)

IN CLASS

1. Distribute "Handout 1- Pre-Reading Questions". Students work individually and their answers are discussed with the whole class.
2. Divide the class into three groups: A, B, C. Give out the handouts with the extracts ("Handout 2-Extract A" to group A; "Handout 3-Extract B" to group B; "Handout 4-Extract C" to group C). The students read the text and discuss it in their group. Each student should be able to re-tell the situation in their text.
3. The students form new groups. Each group now consists of 3 students coming from different groups (A, B, and C). Ask the students to tell one another about their readings. Allow enough time for this stage, as the students should understand all three extracts. Each group can prepare a short summary of the whole extract. They can be shared in class.
4. Distribute "Handout 5 - Sociolinguistic Profile". Ask the students to work in the same groups and answer the questions given. Groups present their answers to the class. A whole-class discussion follows.
5. The students use "Handout 6 - Cultural Comparisons" in the same way as described in step 4.
6. Ask the students to write a letter of advice to Sara and her family. (This can be set as homework if the class time is short.)

References

Hess, Natalie. 2001. *Teaching Large Multilevel Classes*. Cambridge: CUP.

Raslan, Karim. 2001. *Heroes and Other Stories*. Singapore: Time Books International. Handout 1: Pre-reading Questions

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Handout 1 : Pre-reading Questions

Pre - Reading Questions:

Work individually and answer the following questions:

1. Can you describe the traits or characteristics (physical, personality, etc) of your ideal wife or husband?
2. In your opinion, is it important to marry someone who has all of the traits or characteristics described above?
3. What would happen if at the time when you are 30 years old, you still have not found your 'ideal' mate? How would you feel? What would you do?

Handout 2: Extract A

Sara and the Wedding (A)

"Kak Tipah, I really don't mind Shahnaz marrying before me. Azman's such a good man – how can I mind?" There was a note of resignation in Sara's voice as if she were tired of answering the same question again and again. Kak Tipah, her elder similarly unmarried cousin, shook her head in disbelief. She had an instinctual grasp of her cousin Sara's weaknesses and she replied in an insinuating manner, prodding Sara with her forefinger as she spoke.

"Are you sure? I would hate it. Absolutely hate it. I'd insist on a Louis Vuitton cabin-bag in recompense. Not a fake one – mind you. A real one, with LV, LV everywhere," she said, lingering on the letters of the logo.

"You know I'm not like that, Kak Tipah. I want my sister to be happy. So what if she marries before me? It's not as if I can't find a man." Since Sara was both plump and homely, her argument sounded as hollow as a *tempayan* jar at midday and she knew it. Sara had long since grown accustomed to glaring differences between the fabled *Sara Farakruddin: Advocate and Solicitor* of her name card and the sweaty, short-of-breath, hair-thinning, late thirty-something woman she in fact was.

"Well, I'm not the only one who thinks that you look unhappy. My mother thinks the same as well. Kak Tipah wrinkled her nose unpleasantly as she spoke. Sara flushed at the mention of her aunt and stiffened perceptibly.

"I have things to do, Kak Tipah. These *bunga telur* have to be placed on the VIP tables," she said pointedly. However, her anger had got the better of her and she added, "You and Mak Cik Zainah can think whatever you want to think. I really don't give a damn! *Aku tak kisah!*" With that she scooped the *bunga telur* from the table and stormed off.

Handout 3: Extract B

Sara and the Wedding (B)

Cradling the bunga telur in her arms, Sara marched out of the study and onto the verandah which was now enclosed, if not strangled by an extensive ring of corrugated iron roofing – sheltering rows of tables and chairs ready for the night's guests. The unremitting glare of fluorescent lights left the metal tables looking hard and ugly, the chairs flimsy and awkward and she turned away, dispiritedly. Frustrated by the sight and reminded of her 'single', unmarried state, she glanced inside the house again where she caught sight of the bridal *pelamin*, arrayed in gold. She sighed as she studied it, a deep sigh that betrayed, at least for a moment, a trace of what her cousin had been accusing her of. She gazed at the two chairs and swallowed pensively. "If only", she thought, "if only things could be different". Sara couldn't quite dispel a surge of sadness, a wistfulness so keen it almost made her shiver.

Realising, despite her lowness, the dangers of such a train of thought she shook her head severely. She hated succumbing to her family's insinuations and she was determined not to ruin the evening by thinking of what Kak Tipah had said to her.

"Dammit," she whispered to herself, "here I am, a bloody lawyer who can reduce prosecution witnesses and policemen to tears, fretting over my *tak guna punya* family. I must pull myself together. They are not going to get the better of me". She was still a fighter.

She felt tears in her eyes at the unfairness of it all. Here she was dashing about, worrying about her sister's wedding when, in actual fact, the mere thought of it made her feel unwanted and ashamed. Why should she care that Shanaz's *pelamin* was uneven? It wasn't her *bersanding*. She was the fat, unwanted elder sister, the one that they laughed at behind their hands. She was the one who was expected to grow old and useless on a steady diet of loneliness and solitude. They didn't seem to care that she supported half the family, that she had her own successful legal practice, that outside the home she was respected and admired. Damn they, they didn't care – she was just the fat-fat one who was still unmarried.

Suddenly she was afraid. Was she sure that there was anything out there? Would there be anything waiting for her – the ungainly, unfashionable sister? Or rather would there be anybody waiting for her – a nice young man like Azman, maybe?

She knew that the sliver of hope was too valuable to be discarded and she willed, almost desperately, herself to believe in it, utterly and implicitly. She assured herself that there was something out there waiting for her – something, maybe even somebody fine, noble and exciting. Yes, she thought, vowing to herself with a passionate averment, there'll be an Azman for me, too; only he'll be brighter, more charming and less arrogant. Emboldened by this hope, she breathed in deeply, savouring her confident discovery and the pleasure it gave her.

Handout 4: Extract C

Sara and the Wedding (C)

Back in the house and far from the unsettling glow of the garden lights, Sara picked her way through the vats of prepared food, stepping over trays of curry, vermilion-coloured rose water and oily fried chicken. Sitting in the midst of the food and the preparations was Sara's favourite aunt, Mak Cik Khatijah, who was unafraid to admit to working for a living. She squatted under a makeshift shelter, her hair covered by a simple scarf, stirring a vat of bubbling buffalo *rendang*.

"Sara!" she called, "stop your fretting and sit with me. Take this paddle and stir the *rendang*. Mak Cik is tired." Her aunt, despite her appearance, spoke excellent English – a testament to her convent education, English that was peppered with Malay.

"*Kahwin, kahwin-lah!* What's the big deal. You young women think men are so special. But I tell all my nieces and that includes you that men are good for only two things. The first is sex and the second is entertainment. *Main-main saja*: just good for a bit of fun – but don't take home."

"I say take a man and treat him like he'd treat you. *Buat dulu*, only with the handsome one and then you get rid of them: Kelantanese style." Mak Cik Khatijah sniggered to herself.

"At *bersandings* they all look so cute, like Azman. *Sayang* only their wives. *Cium-cium* and *hormat-hormat*. Yes, *sayang*; no, *sayang*. Then they change. You're not missing anything, Sara. Eh, stir it properly, otherwise it will stick to the bottom."

"Actually, I'd better change, Mak Cik."

"Put on your nice *baju*, Sara? Not the frumpy ones. They're for ladies like me. You must enjoy yourself, you know. Experiment. Don't listen to your cousins and your other aunts – they're all so full of themselves. Smug. *Cakap-cakap tak serupa bikin*. They think they are so special. You know, don't you, what I mean?"

"Yes, Mak Cik." With that Sara bounced up from where she'd been squatting and dashed into the house.

Handout 5: Sociolinguistic Profile

Sociolinguistic Profile

Work in groups of 3 and answer the following questions:

1. Where does this story come from? How do you know?
2. In this story, we often see bilingual characters speak in 2 languages alternately. How do you feel about that? Do you have the same experience?
3. What do you think about the words that Sara used to express her feelings towards her family? If you were Sara, would you use the same expressions to express your feelings?
4. In response to Kak Tipah's utterances, Sara said, *"You and Mak Cik Zainah can think whatever you want to think. I really don't give a damn! Aku tak kisah!"*

What do you think about her choice of words? Is it appropriate considering that Kak Tipah is her elder cousin?

5. Look at the conversation between Mak Cik Khatijah and Sara. Here, Mak Cik Khatijah, Sara's favourite aunt, used more Malay expressions than Kak Tipah, Sara's cousin. What do you think about this? Is there any relation between the status of the speaker and the utterances he/she uses?

Handout 6: Cultural Comparisons

Cultural Comparisons

1. In this story, Shahnaz (the younger sister) got married before Sara (the elder one). Kak Tipah suggested Sara to ask for Louis Vuitton cabin-bag in recompense.
 - In some countries like Malaysia and Indonesia, if the younger sister or brother wants to get married before the elder ones, he/she should ask for permission, conduct a special ceremony, and give something to the elder ones. What do you think about this custom?
 - Does your country have a similar custom? Can you describe it?
2. Sara was described as a fat successful lawyer who was still unmarried even though she was almost 30 years old. Her family and relatives often talked about her marital status.
 - In some countries, this situation is considered normal. That is why most women try to get married or at least to find a boyfriend before they reach 30 years of age. To some extent, their family and relatives 'help' them in finding the 'ideal' husband. What do you think about this custom? What are the negative and positive consequences of getting married only because you do not want to stay single after the age of 30?
 - In some cultures, there is nothing wrong if a man stays single after he is 30. Nobody will care about his marital status. What do you think about this situation?
 - In your country, what will happen if a woman or a man stays single after this age? What is the custom there?
3. Everyone in Sara's big family seemed to be involved in preparing Shanaz's wedding.
 - In some cultures, it is said that if you get married, it means that you also marry the whole family of your spouse. What do you think? Do you think the family is also important in arranging your own wedding? What are the advantages and disadvantages of having the whole family involved?
 - In your country, what will happen if a couple wants to get married? Will the whole family be involved?