
USING “STORYBIRD” FOR TEACHING NARRATIVE WRITING

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Abstract

Major changes in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have made lecturers need to come up with an idea of bringing it into the classroom. Indeed, lecturers may not just neglect the impact of new technologies and fail to incorporate them in their teaching practice. One big evolution in classroom technology has been in the development of using webtools for teaching writing. Storybird; a website 2.0 tool, is an excellent new media for teaching narrative writing. It will not only highly motivate the students to write in English and other languages but also it gives an opportunity for the students to control their learning experiences by means of technology device. Beside Storybird can be easily accessed by the students using their netbook, smartphones, or other devices. Thus, this paper deals with the use of Storybird in teaching narrative writing.

Keywords: *Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Storybird, and Narrative Writing*

1. INTRODUCTION

*“Integrating Technology with face-to-face lecturer time generally produces better academic outcomes than employing either technique alone”
(Edutopia)*

Writing is a life skill for people, particularly for college students. If they can write clearly, they can express their ideas convincingly to others – in college, on the job, and in their personal life (Kirszner and Mandell, 2011). In college, they might write a single paragraph, an essay exam, a short paper, or a long research paper. It is strongly supported by Zemach and Rumisek (2005) who say writing is a very important part of university study. At work, they might write a memo, a proposal, or a report. In their personal life, they might write a letter or an email asking for information or pointing out a problem that needs to be solved, or just post a comment on a blog. If they can write, they will be able to communicate; if they can communicate effectively, they can succeed at college and beyond.

Nevertheless, writing also becomes a difficult skill to comprehend (Guoyan, 2007: 18). The students need to stimulate their thinking onto paper, concentrate and organize their ideas, and cultivate their ability to summarize, analyse, and criticize. They also have to master the elements of grammar of a language, vocabulary, mechanics, content, organisation and style. As a result, most students encountered some writing blocks like they have lack of ideas or cannot think any interesting and significant enough ideas to write, are confuse in grammar, choose inappropriate vocabulary, are awkward in using punctuation, or even have the voice of mother tongue on their writing. Beside, they may think writing is a time-consuming activity, or even such a boring activity to do so, as a result, they tend to choose “tricky ways” such as doing cheating or plagiarism. They also tend to write their writing the night before assignments are due so that they only publish final copy look-alike which contains amount of errors. Above all, students are less motivated to write since lecturer only use unattractive and unchallenging activity to arouse their interest in writing.

Referring to this such situation, lecturer needs to engage the students with activities which are easy and enjoyable to take part in. So that writing activities not only become a normal part of classroom life but also present opportunities for students to achieve almost instant access (Harmer, 2007: 113). One way to engage students’ interest to write is by integrating technology to writing learning process. In this case, the lecturer use web tools as an joyful activity. It means the students will write by using computers or compatible tools, a word processing software, and web tool. Here,

the lecturer will not only simply transfer the knowledge to students but also familiarize them with possibilities of integrating technology – web tools, into the classroom.

Storybird is one of website 2.0 tools which enable students to be more creative and imaginative on their narrative writing. *Storybird* also offers a lot opportunities to start a narrative writing process in delightful way. Unlike other web tools, *Storybird* offers the access to the students even for those who are less creative and imaginative. Indeed, It is engaging site that will help the most hesitant writers out of their shell. Aside from its usage, *Storybird* is a free website and easy to use. The users - both lecturer and students, only need to become its member and sign up to the website - www.storybird.com. At the moment, the users already registered their account, they will be headed with three types of account; regular users (any users), school/edu users (lecturers, and students), and professionals (artists, and writers). At *Storybird*, the users could also create picture books (more art and less text), long form books (less art, and more texts or chapters), and poetry (one image and select words) which are supplied by many artworks from certain categories like adventurous thing, life experience, or others. Although it is accompanied by series of pictures, *Storybird* allows the students to focus more on the content of their narrative writing rather than dragging and dropping pictures.

To sum up, integrating technology with face-to-face teaching will give a better learning outcomes, as Edutopia recommends earlier. Here, lecturer is suggested to bring technology into classroom activities and incorporate it to their teaching practice. *Storybird* itself is an effective teaching and learning technology tool which will enhance student learning academic achievement. Indeed, *Storybird* is a marvelous media for teaching narrative writing. It will motivate the students to be *creative* in writing their stories, *selective* in choosing the artworks which go with their stories, and *productive* in publishing plenty of interesting stories. In addition, *Storybird* is an easy web to operate by lecturer, highly engaging for students, can be accessed by all ages. It is also perfect not only for lecturer and students, but it is also useful for artists or even professional writers.

2. ICT FOR TEACHING WRITING

Generally, ICTs or Information and Communication Technologies mean to all technology used to handle telecommunication, broadcast media, intelligent building systems, audiovisual processing and transmission systems, and network-based control and monitoring functions (Techopedia). While Yunus, et.al (2013: 19) argue that ICTs are technological tools and resources which are employed to communicate, create, disseminate, and manage information. These technologies include radio, television, computers, internet, social networks, and so forth. On the other hand, ICT can also be used for education, namely ICT for education. It means Teaching and learning with the Information and Communication Technologies.

As a matter of fact, the emergence of ICTs offer huge opportunities for teaching and learning writing. On the one hand, lecturers can use ICTs to upgrade their roles in teaching writing. Harmer (2001: 261-262) mentions these three roles: motivator, resource, and feedback provider. Actually, whenever they asked their students to write, three essential roles are engraved in. First, lecturer as motivator. By using ICTs, lecturer will motivate the students to write, and create the right condition for the generation of ideas persuading them of the usefulness of the activity and encourage them to make as much effort as possible for maximum benefits; good writing. Second, lecturer as resource. ICTs will make the lecturer enable to supply information and language where necessary, and offer advice or suggestions in constructive and tactful way. Third, lecturer as feedback provider. It can be said lecturer should respond positively and encouragingly to the content of what the students have written through the use of ICTs. Beside maximizing their roles in teaching writing, ICTs can assist them to create interactive classes and make the lessons more enjoyable, which could improve students' attendance and concentration. Indeed, through ICT, lecturers can easily explain complex instructions and ensure the students' comprehension on writing.

On the other hand, students may also get the fruitful side of using ICTs. Through ICTs, images can easily be used in improving the retentive memory of the students so that their interest on writing will be boosted. Then, they will be encouraged to present their ideas or responds to their classmates' ideas in constructive manner. ICTs also allow the students to give effective (peer)

feedback, motivate them to apply knowledge in any content area to a writing task, engaging them in different projects, increasing their engagement with the language, develop their independent work habits, improve their vocabulary knowledge, and allow them to have collaboration and publish their work publicly.

However, using ICTs for education, include writing, also offers another side. First, the use of ICTs could cause the lackadaisical attitude among students whereby they will not take their work seriously. It is relevance with a statement from Sweeny (2010) which says “The students will not take the work seriously and will not use what they have learned in school in their posting”. Second, It is difficult for lecturers to use with a lack of experience using ICT tools. Third, the setting up of the device can be sometime very troublesome. Then, it is too expensive to afford for some students.

All in all, for the last decade, there has been a growing interest in using ICTs to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning in all levels and in both educational and non educational settings. As lecturer, they need to do everything they can to keep abreast of technological change in educational resources (Harmer, 2007: 32). They decide what their students want to achieve and kind of techniques and technology will help their students to do this. Despite the positive things of using ICTs for teaching writing, it also gives its downside.

3. *STORYBIRD*: WHY SHOULD LECTURER UTILIZE IT?

Technologies develop rapidly in twenty-first century classroom around the world. There have a wide range of equipment and technology available, as stated by Harmer (2007: 252). One of big revolution in classroom technology has been in the development of using web tools for teaching writing. Among all web tools to teach writing, *Storybird* gains some upside things like it is free and easy to operate, it attaches with many inspiring artworks, it can be published online, and so on. It also differs from all other story-writing tools by keeping the writing environment uncluttered and simple. Students of almost any age can easily use the professionally designed art on the site to create and then share their stories. Students don't get lost in the unproductive and distracting task of choosing fonts, drawing pictures, and other elements that provide so many distraction from the importance of creating richly detailed, focused stories.

Generally, *Storybird* is defined as a visual story telling community. It is a global hub of readers, writers, and artists of all ages globally. The idea of creating *Storybird* itself is to let anyone make gorgeous, art inspired stories in seconds. At the beginning, this website is used as a way to inspire storytelling with children, and then it has attracted millions of writers, readers, and artists to it's platform. Families and friends, lecturers and students, and professionals have created more than five million stories which makes *Storybird* as one of the world's largest storytelling communities. There are also bunch of concepts of *Storybird* offered by some people. At first, Gakhar and Thompson (2007: 608) who says a *Storybird* is a digital storytelling technology in which engage and motivate students to develop skills for creating creative writing, designing, collaborating, communicating, and reflecting. Then, *Storybird* is a website 2.0 tools where the users can select artwork and write the text to create digital books that can be shared to others (Giacomini, 36). Next, *Storybird* is categorized as a free web tool which provides possibilities for collaborative storytelling (Konert, et.all, 2011: 24). In relevance with these two statements, Menezes (2012: 299) offer her own definition. She assumes that *Storybird* is a free web tool which provides possibilities for collaborative storytelling. Seeing all these concepts, it can be inferred that *Storybird* is a free, an easy to use, and extremely engaging collaborative story-writing website for all ages.

Storybird has three types of account such as regular user (any users), school/edu user (students and educator), and professional user (artist and writer). It also has many theme categories which can be selected freely by users. Each theme serves random pictures that can be easily dragged and removed. It also prepares three kinds of digital books for instance picture books (more art and less text), long form books (less art, and more texts or chapters), and poetry (one image and select words). *Storybird* can be accessed by everyone, also with a fictional ID. One can use it either for writing a story collaboratively or for sharing personal stories with others. Each story called as “*Storybird*”, is presented like digital booklet with separate pages. The author can create a cover and publish his stories on his personal account. Once shared, the stories can be read and commented by others. The author can also invite other users to collaborate on his story or to revise it.

Thereafter, a question arises; “Why should lecturer employ it?”. The lecturers need to utilize *Storybird* in their teaching practice, notably in teaching narrative writing because *Storybird* presents many merits, mostly for students. In general, Konert, et.all (2011: 24) argue a great advantage of *Storybird*. It is the huge set pictures provided. The images can easily be added to the stories. Therefore, the story could be art-inspired or completed by images. The use of tool is very self-explanatory and the tool can be used by students of all ages. *Storybird* is also able to be shared not only to students in or outside of (the same) class, but also to people across the country and the world.

As mentioned earlier, this website mainly gives benefits for students. Most importantly, it’s free. That gives (low-income) students an opportunity to participate in a creative experience. Then, *Storybird* supplies many amazing artworks even if the students have to decide which images to choose and how to order them (Giacomini, 2015: 36). The artwork itself is enough to inspire students to create stories even if they come to the website with nothing in mind. In other word, it allows the students to be creators of something unique; turning nothing into something. The use of artwork assists students to develop their deep reflection and higher-order thinking (Menezes, 2012: 300).

In addition, *Storybird* is also very motivating for students to get into writing since their stories can be published and therefore being and revised by others. Thus the students do not write a story for their own sake of writing it but for other people’s entertainment. Then, students can start to write criticizing the other stories, the students become aware of what a good story consists of. Whenever they start to share and comment on each other works, their confidence and skill will be boistered within a private and safe environment. As a result, they get feeling of how a story becomes interesting and what makes a story boring. In other words, the tool offers an aspect of social learning since the students learn how to criticize their fellow students in a constructive way. By doing this, the students will sharpen their critical thinking.

Furthermore, *Storybird* helps (reluctant and shy) students to acquire their individual responsibility (Menezes, 2012: 299) because the work; create, read, and publish the story is carried out with their own hand. It can be said *Storybird* helps most hesitant writers to bring out of their shell as this can be considered an engaging activity. It also offers the access to the students even for those who are less creative and imaginative. *Storybird* also gives the option of keeping story private until the student is ready to share it. For many students, this feature makes them feel creativity safer. Beside, it is shareable where students could share their stories on blogs, shared via e-mail, downloaded, printed, gifted – even turned into a class fundraiser.

Storybird is easy to use by lecturer because it requires minimal lecturer preparation and allows them to easily create individual user accounts for students. With that, lecturer can view all story books that students are making. *Storybird* is also excellent for many writing assignments such as picture books, log form books, and poems. Lecturer could also check on the progress of their students’ work easily. In term of doing collaborative writing, the website makes the process of collaborating or “taking turns”, very easy. Both lecturers and students are able to edit and help others throughout the story.

Unfortunately, *Storybird* has some limitations, as informed by Konert, et.all (2011: 26). First, it isn’t a real-time writing tool. The collaborator has to refresh the page to see what his partner wrote or he has to wait until his partner has finished and saved the latest draft. Then the other user gets an invitation to go on writing which says “it’s your turn now!” Second, the artwork, as beautiful as it is, is quite limited. The students are left to a rather small bank of illustrations to work with. It is also very difficult to search for artwork that almost similar to their story. With such limitation in artwork, students may end up frustrated. Last, the writer and reader have to pay for printed digital storybook. As a result, they only can screen captured and cropped it into Microsoft word by copying the page.

In conclusion, the use and usage of *Storybird* are really handy for people in all ages, includes students. *Storybird* provides many inspiring artworks that can be created into thousands stories. Once the art is chosen, they are able to build their story by dragging and dropping pictures and creating a story to match. They also can change, edit, correct, and update their work. *Storybird* also allows people to collaborate on a story each person taking turns to add to the story until completed. It

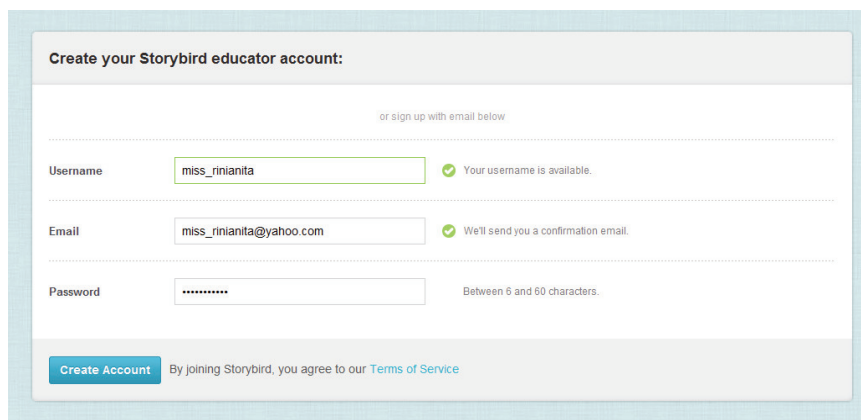
promotes leaning autonomy, self-confidence, and critical thinking. However, it also offers a couple of obstacles.

4. HOW DOES *STORYBIRD* WORK?

An interesting thing about *Storybird* is that it combines art and writing (Giacomini, 2015:37). Students are provided with works of art presented in sequence as if they were part of the plot of a story. However, students have to select the appropriate images which correspond with the story, how to order the images (left, right, up, or down side), and what story they want to tell. In addition, the site gives the students options of writing a long-form book, a poem, and a picture book. In fact, it is not difficult to utilize *Storybird* if they know how to.

1. Registering

To start head over to www.Storybird.com, and click on “The sign up for free” button in the top right corner. There will be three options of creating account; regular user (any users), school/edu user (students and educator), and professional user (artist and writer). Choose an account of educator or students. Then create *Storybird* of educator account, as seen below, or students’ account. Fill any necessary information after that click create account. Once lecturer or students click it, they will be sent an email to confirm the registration.

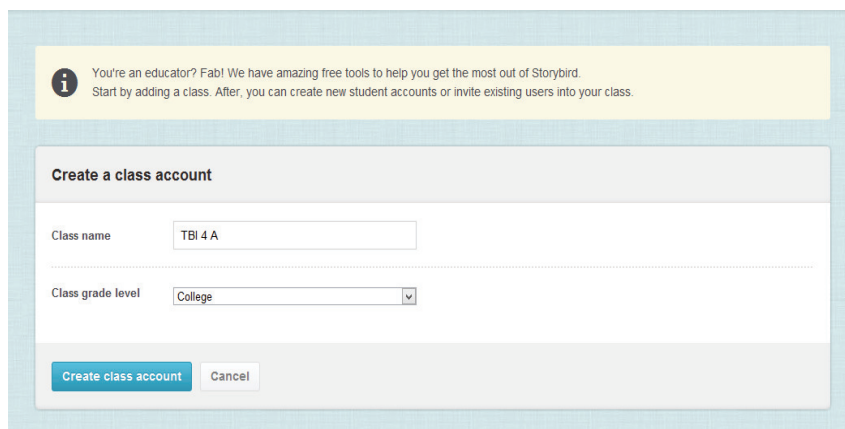


The screenshot shows the 'Create your Storybird educator account' form. It includes fields for Username (miss_rinianita), Email (miss_rinianita@yahoo.com), and Password (masked with dots). There are green checkmarks indicating that the username is available and a confirmation email will be sent. A 'Create Account' button is at the bottom, with a note: 'By joining Storybird, you agree to our Terms of Service'.

2. Logging in

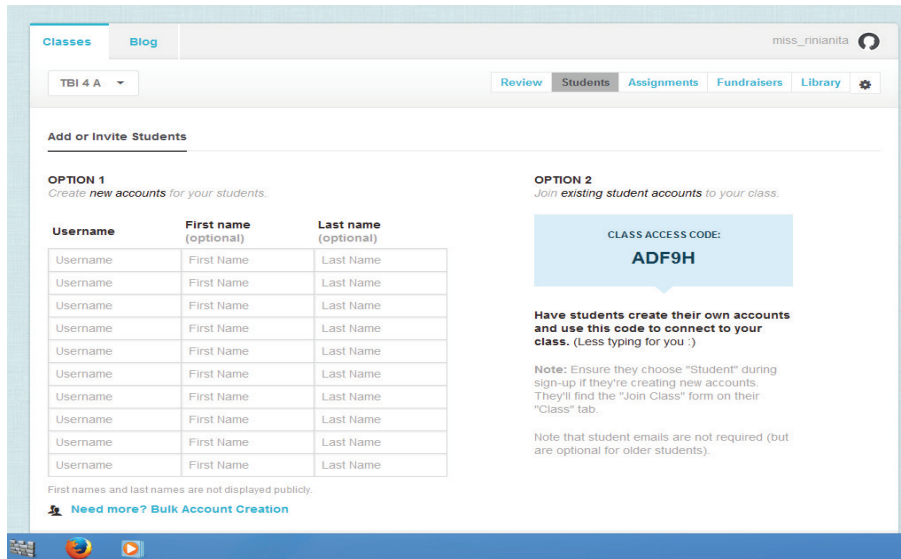
The next steps is to log in to the website of *Storybird* by typing username or email address and password. Lecturer may edit their account by customizing their avatar, changing privacy setting (public or private), or changing e-mail notification setting, or spellcheck setting.

In addition after signing up as lecturers and confirming the account, *Storybird* will prompt them to create a class, as spotted below. With an educator account, they can create and manage multiple classes.



The screenshot shows the 'Create a class account' form. It includes a 'Class name' field (TBI 4 A) and a 'Class grade level' dropdown menu (College). There are 'Create class account' and 'Cancel' buttons at the bottom. A yellow information box at the top says: 'You're an educator? Fab! We have amazing free tools to help you get the most out of Storybird. Start by adding a class. After, you can create new student accounts or invite existing users into your class.'

After they have added the details for their class, it is time to add students. Go ahead and click that big blue button that says “Add or Invite Students.” Lecturers may manually invite the students by creating their account, or let the students to create their own account by giving them a class code, as viewed at the following picture.

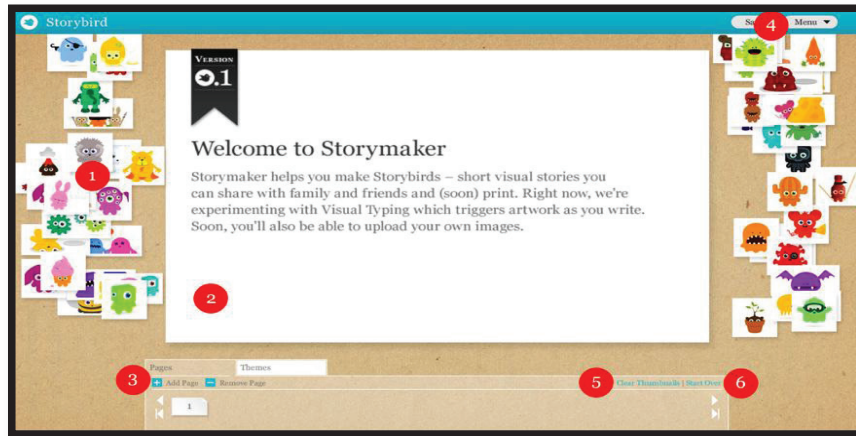


3. Giving an assignment

Lecturers just need to click on “The assignment” button on the dashboard, then, click “Create an assignment” to assign tasks for their students. The lecturer will have to choose a title for the assignment, describe the assignment, use a *Storybird* or photo to inspire their students, choose “ON” if they want students to be able to use spellcheck while writing their *Storybirds*, and select the due date for the assignment. Due dates will appear in the student’s dashboard as a gentle reminder to complete the theme/assignment, then click “Save assignment”. The lecturers can easily view all students’ stories (assignments and own stories) by clicking “Library” on the dashboard.

4. Creating *Storybird* (for lecturers or students)

When lecturers or students want to create their *Storybird*, they just have to sign into the website then at the home page, click “create a *Storybird*”. Explore, choose, and use the available artworks based on themes. If they find themselves have not been inspired by the artworks, they could find more artworks by clicking the button of “see more art”. Whenever, they have chosen the images, it means they are ready to create a *Storybird*, as attached on the picture below.



There are six items presented at the first page of creating *Storybird* such as set of pictures (1), words; in which a place for lecturers or students to write a text (2), pages; place for lecturers or students to add or delete the page (3), menu; place for inviting a collaborator, publish, or save and close (4), thumbnails; place for removing all thumbnails but still leaving the page (5), and start over; place for removing all thumbnails and pages. Then lecturers or students are ready to create a cover of their story. After that, they can make a story by dragging pictures to the page and type words into the box provided. Next, if they wish to add another page, just click “add a page”. They may use “Remove a Page” button to delete a previously-created page in their *Storybird*. Whenever, lecturers or students need to invite collaborator, they just have to do it into places; from the menu inside storymaker or from the dashboard.

5. Inviting collaborator (for students)

On previous paragraph, it has been discussed that *Storybird* is a collaborative writing site. *Storybird* focuses on story-making as a collaborative process. *Storybird* can be used collaboratively with, either with another student in class or school, or with students from different schools in the region or even from another country (qtd in Menezes, 2012: 299). The first thing should be done by students to ask collaborator join with their story is by fulfilling an invitation form, as cited below.

As soon as, their friends receive e-mail notification, they are ready to join in the *Storybird*. Afterwards, the students will also get notification to “take turns” or “switch turns” on dashboard until they are set to publish their *Storybird*.

6. Publishing *Storybird*

Whenever lecturers or students (or collaborator) want to finish and publish *Storybird*, they have to choose “publish” from storymaker menu. It means they are bound if their story are read by others.

5. NARRATIVE WRITING

Generally, narrative or story is any report of connected events, actual or imaginary, presented in a sequence of written or spoken words, or still or moving images (Wikipedia). Narration also tells a story, presenting events in chronological order or time order moving from beginning to end (qtd in Kirszner and Mandell, 2011). Baldick, C (2008), also gives his own definition on narrative. He states:

... telling of some true or fictitious event or connected sequence of events, recounted by a narrator to a narratee. Narratives are to be distinguished from descriptions qualities, states or situations, and also from dramatic enactments of events recounted in a process of narration. The narrative will consists of a set of events in which the events are selected and arranged in a particular order.

Meanwhile narrative writing is defined as a story writing or report of events, personal experiences, or any similar incidents, whether they are real or fictitious (Adam, 2015: 4). It can be broadly defined as story writing – a piece of writing characterized by a main character in a setting who encounters a problem or engages in an interesting, significant or entertaining activity or experience. What happens to this main character is called as the plot. The plot follows a beginning, middle, and end sequence. The middle of the story is the largest, most significant part which we call the main event. The main event is really what the story is all about and involves either a problem to be solved or a significant life experience for the main character. Authors write narrative stories in order to entertain audience of others – this called the author’s purpose.

In addition, narrative writing is as one of the most essential writing skill that English language major students have to command (Adam, 2015: 1). It presents many fruitful benefits of developing narrative writing. First, it helps students develop imaginative thinking and participles in literacy understanding as a whole. Second, it is extremely important in the field of education, culture, and in our lives as stated by psychologist Jerome Bruner (2007). Hence, narrative writing is very significant in our lives, help students develop imaginatively and develop bridging the cultural gaps.

The main function of narrative writing is to entertain, to gain and hold the readers’ interest. It also deals with actual or vicarious experience in different ways, and with problematic events which lead to a crisis or turning point of some kind which in turn finds a resolution. There are many types of narrative such as imaginary, factual or a combination of both. They may include short stories, fairy stories, mysteries, science fiction, romances, horror stories, adventure stories, fables, myths and legends, or personal experiences.

In conclusion, a narrative is a story containing specific elements that works together to create interest for not only the author but also the reader. This type of writing makes the reader feel as if he or she were part of the story, as if it was being told directly to him or her. The basic purpose of narrative is to amuse or entertain the readers.

6. USING *STORYBIRD* TO TEACH NARRATIVE WRITING

Story bird is a new way to collaborate and be creative at the same time. It offers a lot opportunities to start a narrative writing process. Giacomini (2015:36) recommends the use of *Storybird* as one more tool for teaching creative or narrative writing. It has been proved successfully in her English language class. The result is remarkable: *Storybird* is able to maximize learning opportunities through meaningful learner involvement.

There are couple of steps of using *storybird* to teach narrative writing. The first step is exploring stroybird web 2.0 yourself. Lecturers had to make sure they have good command of using it before presenting it to the students. Then they have to create class account which parallel with amount of the class. They need to pay attention on students’ privacy by having one account per class and not to mix the virtual classrooms.

The second steps is creating *Storybird*. Lecturers need to create it as sample to be shown in the classroom later. The idea is to give a sight for students about what they were going to work on.

Then, they should be guided to register on the website. If necessary, lecturers provide them with online tutorials.

The third step is explaining narrative writing along with its writing processes to the students. Narrative writing has some elements such as plot, setting, characters, main events (conflicts and solutions). Meanwhile the writing processes are prewriting – planning what is going to write; writing – writing the draft from start to finish; rewriting – writing the correct one by making some correction in content and organization (revising), and in grammar, diction, and mechanics (proofreading). These things are done virtually at *Storybird* web 2.0

The fourth step is assigning the students with a simple form of *Storybird*; picture books. It has an aim to familiarize them with the web tools. The lecturer may ask the students to create narrative writing for ten till twenty pages based on the artwork that inspired them the most. Afterwards, they are quite good with the tools, lecturer may give them another assignment that was more guided had different objectives. For instance, this time, the lecturer ask the students to create long form books from the chosen artwork, or topics given. The minimum page numbers are twenty page, but the maximum one is not limited. They used *Storybird* while making meaningful connections and using certain language structures they had already learnt. The lecturer may assign class project by asking students to create a story by cooperating as a team. It means each student has to write several sentences to be joined with other students' sentences until it builds a story. They do a true collaborative writing.

Thus, *Storybird* is an effective media for teaching narrative writing. They not only can create the story by using English, but also they can create story on other languages, even if their own mother tongue, because they have an inner to do so. They may also create thousands stories whenever they have already publish one. The lecturer are also able to check the progress of their students' work. It is made *Storybird* as number one choice to teach narrative writing.

7. CONCLUSION

Narrative writing is the most interesting type of essay writing among EFL learners, because it is about writing stories. In fact, students are naturally inclined to write stories of their interests more than other types of writing. However, they are still less motivated to write since lecturers do not use effective media to teach narrative writing. *Storybird* comes as a bright idea to alleviate this problem. *Storybird* has a more powerful, active, and autonomous role impact on students' confidence when using English. Though, it has many benefits, it also offers a bit obstacles. This paper has tried to propose some steps of using *Storybird* to teach narrative writing. Last, there is a wide room to do any suitable variations in applying the steps given.

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