*Ludic Language Pedagogy Playground*
#7 (2025)
https://www.llpjournal.org/

# Labov's Story Burger and Emoji Story Inspiration

Mark L. W. Johnson [a*]

[a] *Kochi University*

### 🎴 Item Details

***History:***
Submitted: 2024/11/23
Open peer reviewed: ✔️
Published: 2025/01/01

***Keywords:***
community of practice
EFL
emoji
materials design
oral storytelling
visual aids

***Peer reviewers:***
James York
Jonathan deHaan
Martin Sedaghat
Richard Durham

### 🔑 Key points

- **What is this?** Playful visual materials to make oral stories happen fast in the classroom.
- **Why did you make it?** To facilitate learners' oral storytelling.
- **Who is it for?** Teachers teaching oral storytelling to (young) adult learners.

### Tweet synopsis

Play can be for teachers and learners both and ideas do seem to fit well between buns. Ideas for digestible visual aids arise from reflective work and collegial interactions in online communities of practice.
#PutWordsBetweenBuns #EmojiInspiration

**View at the LLP Playground**:
https://llpjournal.org/2025/01/01/johnson-m-labov-story-burger-emoji-story-inspiration.html

**Supplementary materials here**:
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1-O-602AGXGpCdGSDIkm1Cq7LQ8sOozRZ?usp=sharing

* Corresponding author. *Email address:* m.jonson@kochi-u.ac.jp *(Mark Johnson [he/him])*

## 1. Storytelling in the EFL classroom

Narration is a core genre of spoken communication (Bakhtin, 1986; Labov and Waletzky, 1967). Oral storytelling is also a communication skill valued in a remarkable variety of disciplines across contexts, including business management (Denning, 2006), marketing (Woodside et al., 2008), science communication (Dahlstrom, 2014), and cultural heritage (Corntassel et al., 2009). It is a traditional form of entertainment popular around the world (Cvorovic & Coe, 2022) and here in Japan (Sweeney, 1979), the context of this playground. It is also a core component of leisure activities, from social drinking (Poppi and Beccaria, 2022) to formalized collaborative storytelling games such as Rory's Story Cubes (O'Connor, 2005), Lasers and Feelings (Harper, 2013), and The Deep Forest (Diaz Truman & Alder, 2014).

This wide range of applicability makes oral storytelling a valuable skill for adult learners to develop, and therefore an important part of an oral language curriculum. Despite a keen personal interest in storytelling, especially as a part of games like those mentioned above as well as the highly popular Dungeons and Dragons (*Player's Handbook*, 2014), I didn't feel confident in my own repertoire or ability to tell my own stories in a meaningful and engaging way for most of my life. Perhaps due to this lack of confidence, I did not try to incorporate storytelling into my lessons for the first decade or so of my teaching practice. The idea of a meaningful story that I had long held was something more dramatic and more remote than the memories of personal experiences I had in my head.

Accordingly, when I first tried to teach a unit on storytelling, I focused on dramatic storytelling techniques like use of tense-shifting from past to the present during action, the use of intense verbs (e.g. leaped vs. jumped) and descriptive language. I modeled these techniques in the one story I thought was worth telling from my life, of a time when I warded off a toxic drunk at a drinking establishment in my college days (in retrospect it is one of the less meaningful stories to me now). My college students of English as a foreign language could generally understand and manage the skills in isolation, but I was rarely able to get them to share their own stories.

There is a broad array of literature on oral storytelling in the language classroom (Lucarevschi, 2016), including classroom activities (Morgan & Rinvolucri, 1983; Wajnryb, 2003; Wright, 1995, 1997), a special issue of The Language Teacher (JALT, 2002), teaching frameworks (Deacon & Murphey, 2001; Jones, 2001) and even the impact of remixing textbooks into stories (Macalister & Thao, 2023). The most impactful literature for my teaching practice, however, has been Labov's model of oral narratives of personal experience (Labov, 1982, 2013 pp. 14-43; Labov & Waletsky, 1967).

The first time I taught the Labov model and listened to the amazing range of moving and engaging experiences and episodes from my students' lives, I realized that we are all full of stories, and that they are an everyday occurrence. It is the way we frame our experiences that makes them impactful both for listeners, and I would argue for the teller as well. For, in retelling an experience in a particular frame we recreate it in our minds and it can begin to take new meaning for us.

This first success in eliciting narratives of my students personal experiences came after a five lesson unit leading up to the students' storytelling performances. Fostering that same productive development within the timeframe of a shorter series of lessons has been an ongoing goal and an interesting process. This iterative development is briefly summarized in Table 1.

| First attempt | | Reductive change | | New framework | | Reductive change | | Additive change |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Focused on dramatic storytelling techniques | ➡ | Focused on fewer selected dramatic storytelling techniques | ➡ | Dropped technique focus and adopted Labov's model with detailed analysis from Cortazzi (1994) | ➡ | Simplified to a "problem sandwich" metaphor with a lead-in, problem, and ending | ➡ | Restored the full model as Labov's story burger, added emoji story inspiration |

**Table 1** Iterative development of storytelling unit

The framework I used in the current iteration of this course draws heavily on a task-based learning and teaching cycle (Skehan, 1996; Willis 1996). The task series is illustrated abstractly in Figure 1 and in more detail in Appendix 1. The unit on oral narrative appears as the middle line of tasks from "Speaking Task 2" to the following instance of instructor assessment in Figure 1. The lesson[1] where the materials to be introduced in this playground appeared was the second in that unit (Lesson 7 in Appendix 1).

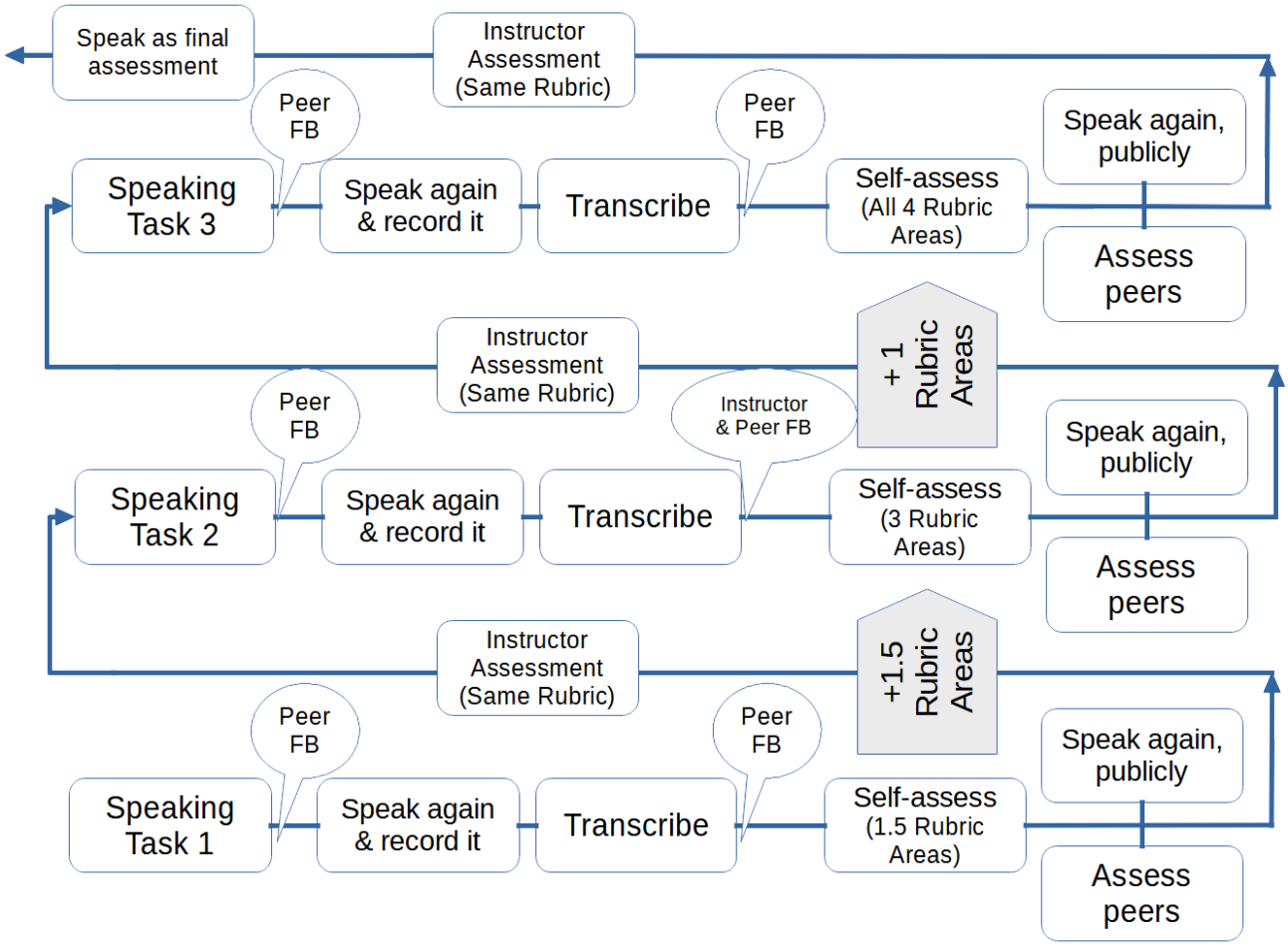



**Figure 1** Primary task cycle used in the course currently.

To characterize the pedagogical approach generally, it was heavily reliant on learner pre-task planning and post-task reflection as well as constructive peer interaction behaviours. As such, the course began with a peer interaction intervention based on Sato (2013) and Sato and Ballinger (2012) designed to promote constructive interaction and feedback behaviors among the students. Each speaking task was then followed by feedback (abbreviated as FB in Figure 1), usually from peers but occasionally from the instructor where possible. The focus on peer feedback was due to the difficulty of providing sufficient and timely individual feedback as the sole instructor of 25 to 30 students per class for four sections of the course. Other informal feedback occurred at various stages, but the feedback sessions shown in Figure 1 were planned and more formal. From here on I will discuss, much more narrowly, two playfully designed materials from the above framework that have helped streamline the instruction of storytelling in this English conversation course.

[1] Copy of the lesson plan in which these materials appeared: 2024EC2 Have you ever? 🔪& Story Structure 🍔

## 2. Making playful visual aid materials

Materials make up the *meat*[2] of many language learning lessons. For some teachers they are the *bread and butter*[3] of teaching, whether self-made or off the shelf. For me, as you will see in section 2.1 below, materials have fulfilled both metaphors as a delicious sandwich of buttery bread and meat (if you like). Playful materials are not new. For example, poop themed study materials here in Japan have purportedly sold millions of copies (Nikkan Sports, 2022) and continue to be sold today. I would like to make materials that are not *crap*, however. Please excuse my language play, but the use of playfulness is core to this journal and the community of practice that surrounds it. This community has helped me to discover SPACE (York, 2023; deHaan & York, forthcoming) to play in my context and to embrace a playful attitude in my teaching, which I believe may also benefit my learners in adopting foreign language playfulness (Cook, 2000; Waring, 2013).

### 2.1 Labov's story burger and other sandwiches in the LLP community of practice

There are a lot of diagrams and other visual organizers in academic publications. Some of them are intuitive or effective at illustrating a concept, others less so. Easton (2016), for example, adapted Labov's model into a series of interconnecting arrows which give the impression that one aspect of the narrative linearly leads to the next (see Figure 2). In its full expression, or "normal form" (Labov and Waletzky, 1967: 40), the model consists of an abstract, orientation, series of complicating actions, resolution, evaluation and coda. The abstract introduces the impetus for the telling of the story or a general overview of what the story is about. The orientation fills in the necessary gaps in understanding the context of the story for the listeners. The complicating action is actually a series of events comprising what happened in the story. The resolution describes how those complicating events came to an end. The evaluation is an expression of the importance or deeper meaning of the story for the teller. The coda signifies the end of the story or connects it to the present day in some way. While Easton's graphic summarizes these individual elements effectively, the implication of linearity shown in the arrows leading into each other misrepresents the model to a degree, because the different parts may occur in a different order, and some, such as the abstract, orientation, and coda, may not appear at all (Cortazzi, 1994; Labov & Waletzky, 1967).

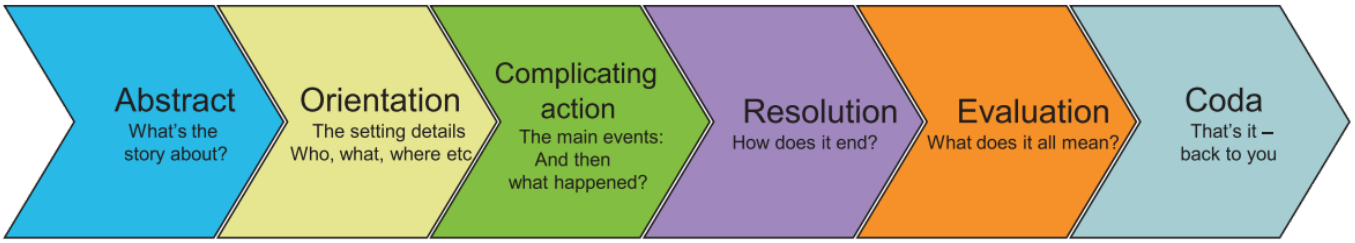



**Figure 2** Labov's model of personal narratives as adapted by Easton (2016)

When engaging in collegial discussions through the Ludic Language Pedagogy community of practice on Discord[4], I introduced Labov's model to James York. He then searched and found it as represented by the above figure from Easton (2016)'s paper. Disappointed with this visualization of the model, but unable to find a better version, I had been thinking about a better representation to help my students digest it for some time. I later asked James why he used the hamburger emoji 🍔 in the title of his project's Discord channel, and in reply, he introduced me to buns.life a tool made to design memes by putting words between buns and in doing so encourage consideration of the deeper meaning of sandwiches (Bogost, n.d.). Over time these ideas coalesced into a powerful multimodal metaphor and much more fitting to Labov's model (see Figure 3), perhaps reflecting the potential productivity of Bogost's ontological sandwich memetic tool. It is worth noting that I changed "complicating action" to "problem" for sake of brevity and ease of understanding, since in my context this model is intended to be used as a teaching tool rather than an analytical research instrument.

[2] meat: "matter of importance or substance; the gist or main part (of a story, situation, etc)" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2024)
[3] bread and butter: "A basic, ordinary, or routine part of something" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2024)
[4] Join here: https://discord.gg/je9QZsntf


**Figure 3** Labov's model of stories of personal experiences as a burger originally made with buns.life

In Lesson 7, Task 6 (Appendix 1) I introduced the model without the burger first and had students try to match the parts of a story they had heard in the previous lesson to the six elements of the model. Then, after that first bout of wrestling with the concepts, I walked them through the metaphor of the burger. Now, let me take you out for some Labov's story burgers, much the same way I did with my students when I introduced the model.

> *Labov studied a lot of English speakers and found that their stories of their experiences tended to have these six parts: abstract, orientation, problem, resolution, evaluation, and coda. We are going to use this model to help us think of how we can tell our own stories. First and most importantly, when you go to buy a sandwich, the first part of your decision is probably about what kind of **PRO**TEIN you want to eat, right? Do you want to eat beef? Fish? Chicken? Or maybe you're going to have a vegan burger? Well, it's the same with a story. Start by thinking of a **PRO**BLEM. See? The first three letters are the same: P-R-O! Now, these other middle layers? They can come in any order really, but if you layer them like this (pointing to the burger), I promise you it will be delicious. The same is true of a story lined up like this, it's both memorable and impactful. Lastly, you can totally eat these fillings with a knife and fork if you want, right? But they are much easier to eat sandwiched between buns! It's the same with a story, if you start with "This is a story about so-and-so" and end with "... and that was the story of how I so-and-so" it's a lot easier to swallow.*

This teaching script encourages learners to follow a process similar to the cognitive process speakers go through leading up to the actual telling of a story, called narrative preconstruction (Labov, 2006). While requiring learners to come up with a story in a pedagogical context does not create the same naturalistic impetus for telling a story, the process of preconstruction should be similar. That is, a teller first decides on a reportable event and then thinks back in time from that to a logical starting point. The most reportable event and the series of causation leading up

to it will become the problem, or complicating actions. The logical starting point is found by following the causal chain back until an action or event does not require explanation.

I will illustrate how one learner has implemented the burger model, performed narrative preconstruction, and developed a simple narrative of a traumatic experience (Table 2). We can assume that the student recalled "I broke 4 teeth" as a highly reportable event. The cause of that was clearly "drop down those stairs", and the action leading to that was "I was rolling". I believe it is safe to say that "rolling" is without need of explanation as a five year old's typical behavior. However, the degree of danger is not necessarily clear for the listener, so the orientation describes the precarious situation including the speaker's age at the time, which explains the precipitous action of rolling and the ultimate result of "a lot of blood" and further injury. This is followed by the evaluative description of pain and fear, the trauma of the event, and reiterated in the coda, bringing us to the present with "now". After performing the preconstruction, the student remembered to begin with an abstract of the narrative, "This is the dangerous story" and then went on to express the events in spoken English.

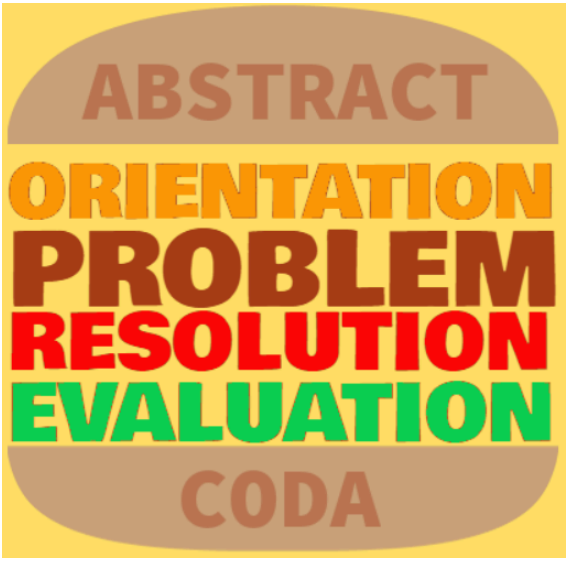
| Example Story (Student's Transcript) | Metaphoric Fit | Story Burger |
|---|---|---|
| This is the dangerous story when I was 5 years old. | Abstract bun with some melted-on orientation cheese. |  |
| My house has very long and steep stairs. | Orientation cheese | |
| e… I was rolling drop down those stairs.<br>e… Then, I broke 4 teeth. | Problem protein | |
| There was There was a lot of blood. I was cut on eyebrow. | Resolution sauce | |
| It was very painful and scared. This… This happened, I was afraid down stairs. | Evaluation lettuce with some resolution sauce | |
| I very careful down stairs now. | Coda bun | |



**Table 2** The metaphoric fit of the burger model to a student's story using representative color coding.

I'm delighted to say the burger has been met with laughter in each lesson I used it. I interpret laughter as success, because it seems to show that learners could connect the juxtaposed ideas and understand them well enough to find humor in the gap. I attribute that success to iterative development in using this framework with students in the same context, reflecting on the outcome, discussing it with the community of practice on the LLP Discord, and playing with the ideas to develop successive iterations.

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### 2.2 Emoji Story Inspiration

The second part of the material set that served me well in this unit was a carefully curated visual spread of emoji for story inspiration. As mentioned above, in narrative preconstruction a speaker must first recall a reportable, or tellable, event. In a naturalistic conversation this is likely cued by relevant discourse or recency of the event. In the classroom it is, to some extent, forced and artificial. Much like myself, many of my students claimed to have no interesting experiences to recount, or could not think of any at least. This is in part related to the idea that when considering whether a story is tellable, speakers must navigate appropriateness between a lower, overly banal

boundary and an upper overly indecent boundary, and further that when telling stories in naturalistic settings they may tend toward the upper boundary (Norrick, 2005). However, after hearing the most amazing story from a student about their experience choosing drinks at a vending machine (see Appendix 2), I now firmly believe that every student has story-worthy experiences every day. The instigating event in that learner's case was as simple as being unable to decide whether to drink a peach flavor drink or soda. While the ultimate result of this particular story would probably fall within the boundaries of tellability in most contexts, the everyday situation in which it occurred is more important, pedagogically speaking. By beginning to think in terms of the frame of a narrative, seemingly less tellable events can be reframed as more interesting and worthwhile. Invoking the stories within students however requires well-crafted prompts, which both help stimulate recall and signal the bounds of appropriate content matter.

In the past I elicited stories by asking "Have you ever" or "What was the -est you ever?" questions. These worked for students who could answer in the affirmative, but to see success with many students required a long list of questions, which then took time for the students to read, understand, and consider. In this latest iteration of the storytelling unit I did include "Have you ever" questions as a warm-up activity and a short list of question prompts, but decided to add additional prompting material as well. Inspired by the avid use of emoji in both the community and publications of this journal (e.g. deHaan, 2021), and by the growing set of available emoji, I decided to use them as spatially efficient and evocative prompts for students' stories (Figure 4).

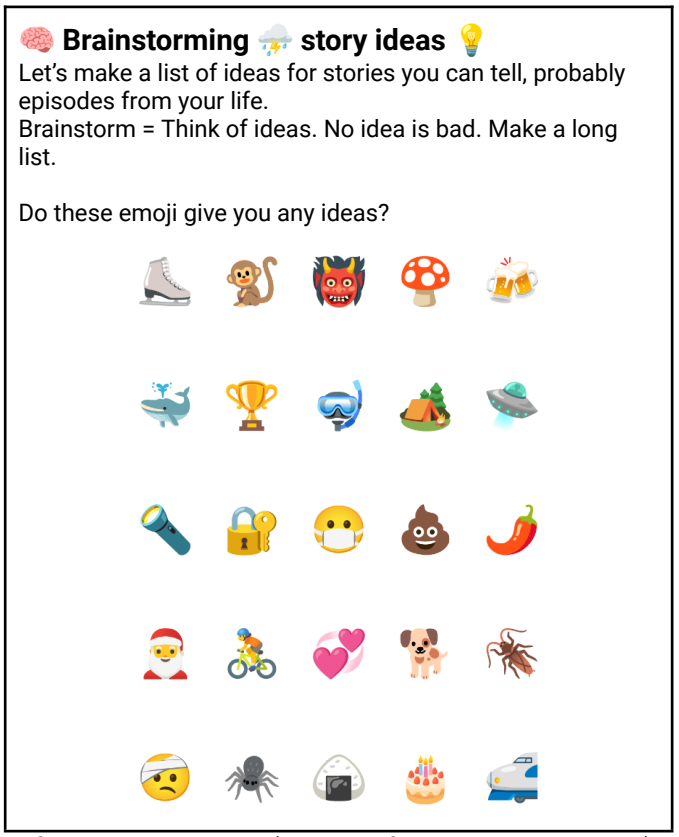


**Figure 4** Visual spread of emoji for story inspiration (Adapted from lesson materials)

In Lesson 7, Task 7 (Appendix 1), I began by checking the students' familiarity with the concept of brainstorming. Only a few students in each class reported having knowledge or experience with the practice. As such, I explained the idea of unfiltered thinking, like a "storm of ideas" flowing out of their brain. I told them to write down any ideas that occur to them, to try to make a long list of ideas, and that no idea is bad; all ideas are good. This is in part to lower the bottom bound of what they might consider tellable, so that more commonplace events might be included and accepted within the classroom community. Then I moved on to verbalize the emoji presented in the visual spread in English and in doing so suggest how a few of the emoji might connect with experiences they have had. I pointed to the emoji shown below as I spoke.

*Maybe you have a monkey story 🐒? Or had a scary experience with oni at nursery school 👹? Have you ever seen a UFO 🛸? I have. Maybe you have a spicy food story🌶️, a cockroach story🪳, or a story about an injury🤕?*

In 25 characters the chosen spread of emoji covers a wide range of topics and types of experiences. Laying them out in a 5x5 grid with spaces between each row puts them in a vertically oriented rectangular shape similar to a typical smartphone display. I suggest that the parallel layout may encourage interaction with young adult students who may spend a considerable amount of time using smartphones. In the original materials, five emoji appeared directly adjacent to each other without spaces in each row. The reviewers of this playground noted that such a display was reminiscent of a set of images produced from Rory's Story Cubes[5] (O'Connor, 2005). Since the intention was for each emoji to be a separate prompt, space has been added between each emoji in the horizontal dimension as well in Figure 4.

My learners are mostly first year Japanese university students, and the emoji I selected are oriented toward that demographic. I will explain the rationale for including a few of the images here, and later contrast this with the emoji some students actually reported being inspired by further below.

⛸️ Being in the southern part of Japan where winters are mild, ice-skating is a relatively uncommon activity and thus may bring to mind other winter sports or uncommon physical activities. This aspect of interesting and uncommon experiences is made salient by prefacing the brainstorm with "Have you ever" question and answer activities in Tasks 1 and 2 of the same lesson (Appendix 1).
👹 The oni is a Japanese *yokai* or demon-like monster that often appears at certain events at Japanese nursery schools, which may be frightening and memorable for young children.
🔦 The flashlight invokes the darkness, a prototypical domain of fear and uncertainty where many scary things happen.
🎅 Santa Claus is notably a non-Japanese import into Japanese culture. As such, beside eliciting Christmas happenings, this emoji may also connect to other imported culture or western influences.
🪳 Cockroaches are a common pest, especially in rural Japan, and pests are by definition seen as a problem.
🚅🚲 Trains are a nearly ubiquitous form of transportation in Japan. Bicycles are also very commonly used by the students. Transportation troubles are not uncommon and the saliency of these two modes may make them easy to relate to.

◺◺◱ **TEACHING TIP**
Consider your learners and context when designing your own emoji story chooser. Also keep in mind that highly emotional experiences are often the most memorable.

Following the emoji spread I also presented a short series of question prompts about their experiences, as I have in the past, and reproduced here.

*Questions to help you think:*

*What was the scariest thing that ever happened to you?*
*What was a funny story that happened to you?*
*What was a big mistake you made?*
*What was the hardest thing you ever did?*
*Did you ever have a major injury? What happened?*

[5] The similarity was highlighted by all three reviewers, which inspired me to create just such an emoji-based story prompt generator, playable at: https://markmrwizard.itch.io/emoji-story-prompt

After introducing these two types of prompts (emoji and question) I gave them time to consider them and reflect on the various other potential sources of inspiration arising up to this point in the course, and make a list of as many ideas for stories as possible. Other than the emoji list and question prompts, sources of inspiration included an earlier travel story conversation activity (Task 2 in Lesson 6, Appendix 1), my own telling of a family trip to Hawaii (Task 4 in Lesson 6, Appendix 1), the warm-up activity using "Have you ever" questions, and the burger model above. One student reported their source of inspiration as "鉄板のネタ [teppan no neta]" which may be interpreted as a "go-to story", however further explanation was not provided. Not all students drew inspiration from only one source, but the total number of responses including each source can be seen in Figure 5. Of fifty-eight respondents, nine reported being inspired by the emoji list. Of those nine, three students reported that the emoji list was their sole source of inspiration. To frame that number in a positive sense, for three students, emoji were sufficient to remind them of a story-worthy personal experience.

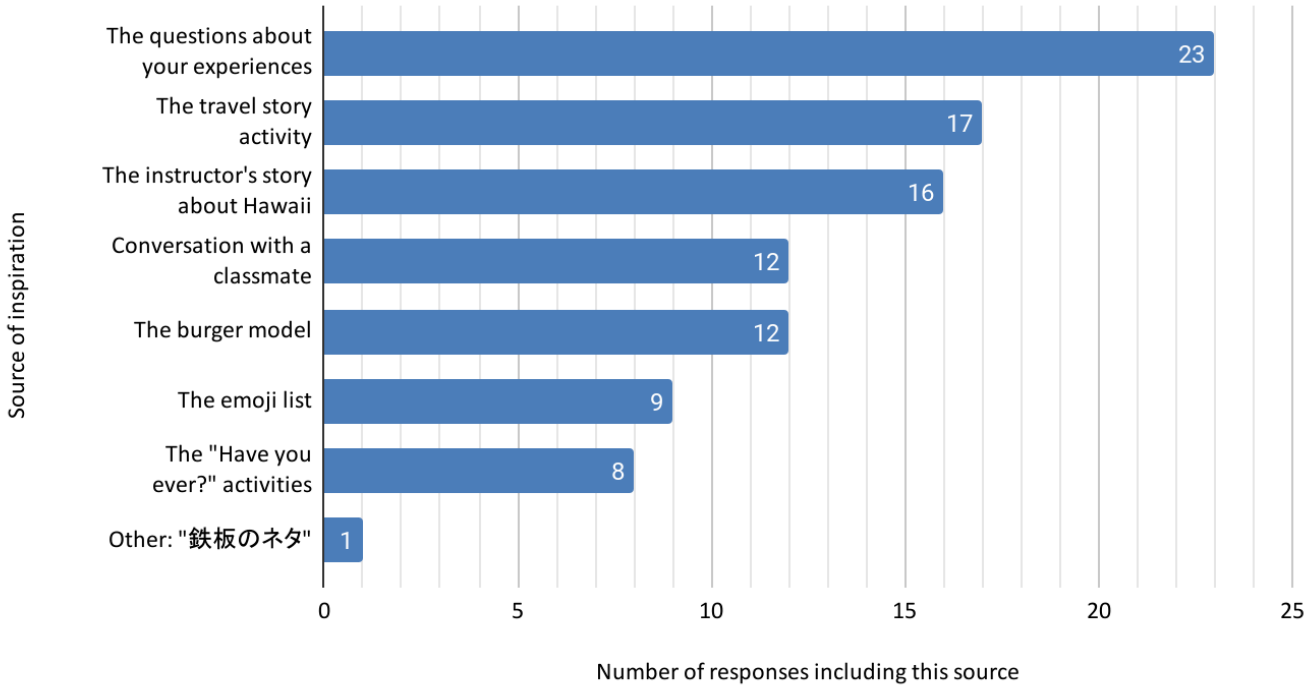


**Figure 5** Sources of story inspiration reported by student respondents[6]

To illustrate how these sources of inspiration developed into student narratives, I will share a few of the students' transcripts of their stories. Some personal information has been redacted, but they are otherwise presented as submitted in Lesson 7, Task 13 (Appendix 1). The stories included below are from the students who responded to my follow-up email inquiring as to specifically which emoji or which question led to their idea.

The first story (1) was reportedly inspired by the "key pictogram", 🔐, and the question "What was the scariest thing that ever happened to you?"

(1) *Hello! My name is [redacted]. Nice to meet you! Today, let me tell you about a happening that happened to me. It happened when I was is umm in the fifth grade. I always went to my grandmother's house after school. One day ,umm I went back to my grandmother's house, and she was gone. I accepted that my grandmother was gone, then went to the restroom. Then when I tried to get out, the lock was broken, and I was locked in. No one helped me because there was no one at my grandmother's house. There was a very small window in the restroom. I decided to get..out…get out of there. I shrunk my body to the minimum and slowly exited. We made it. And my happening was over. Thank you for listening.*

[6] This data was gathered in a unit-end reflection survey. The impetus for including this question in the survey was reviewer comments regarding learning outcomes of this material set. The transparency and expedience of the open peer review model was essential in enabling the timely collection of this information.

The next story (2) was reportedly inspired solely by the cake emoji, 🎂.

(2) *When I was 5 years old, I ate Hina-matsuri cake with my family. After finishing dinner, My father put the cake on the table. And he set it on fire. I was sitting in front of the cake. My father was preparing the camera. My mother was bringing the plate. My sister was preparing the drinks. I couldn't wait. I licked the cake. Then, my right eyelashes burned. I was so surprised I couldn't do anything. My family was surprised to see my condition. My father splashed water on my face and put out the fire. My bang and eyelashes are frizzy. But I didn't have a single injury. Now my eyelashes are fully grown.*

The following story (3) was reportedly inspired by the story burger activities and the trophy emoji, 🏆.

(3) *I'm going to talk about my experience playing table tennis.*
*I started playing table tennis seriously when I was in the fourth grade of elementary school.*
*In the sixth grade, there was a match to represent the prefecture.*
*There were only two spots for the fifth grade and sixth graders.*
*At first, a league was held, and I came in first in that league,*
*and then the next league started. That league was filled in filled with almost only strong players, so from this point on, I had to win as many games as possible.*
*I was very nervous.*
*Although I lost once, I won all the remaining games.*
*I didn't get first place, but I came in second and was selected to represent the prefecture.*

The next story (4) was reportedly inspired solely by the mushroom emoji, 🍄.

(4) *OK. Hi! I want to talk about my outdoor education trip in this summer.*
*In this summer, I went Kiyosato. Do you know Kiyosato? Kiyosato is plased middle of Mt.Akadake. And Mt.Akadake is plased betwen Nagano prefecture and Yamanashi prefecture. I went with my mother and my mother's friend.*
*We stayed "hotel seisenryo". Hotel seisenryo is surrounded forest and many nature. So we can det education program with Seisenryo's instructor.*
*In education prgram, we find, we found mashrooms in... at the forest. we found many mashrooms. Egg shape mashroom and so big mashrooms. And part of program, instructor said "everyone,try to eat this mashrooms. this mashroom have poison, so you don't swallow it." It is my first time to eat poisonous mashrooms. So it's so scary but I put it on my tongue. it is spicy and hot like a chili pepper's taste. And of couse, We, we did'nt swallow it. It is so scary but it's so interesting experience.*
*That is my trip in kiyosato. that's all. thank you.*

The next story (5) was reportedly inspired by a combination of group conversation activity, the question "What was the scariest thing that ever happened to you?", and the emoji 🔐, which the student interpreted as having a meaning near to "money".

(5) *My interesting story in karaoke. When I was in high school student, I went to karaoke with my friends ,…and I went to karaoke near my friend`s house by bicycle in the morning . …I stayed at karaoke for about 5 hours, and in the evening…. I realized that I had lost my wallet when I paid the fee and left the karaoke ... but I immediately remembered that I had left wallet on my bicycle . The wallet had 30000 yen in it . So I hurried to the outside of the store to get it, and the wallet was not even a single yen was taken…. Shiga Prefecture is a safe prefecture.*

The last story which I received a response about (6) was likely written in advance and recited, as opposed to spoken and transcribed as directed. Generally speaking, such stories exhibit more complexity, length, common machine translation errors (e.g. "your car" instead of "her car") and a noticeable reading cadence in the recorded

audio. Nevertheless, the narrative was reportedly inspired by the story burger activities, the question “Did you ever have a major injury? What happened?”, and the trophy emoji, 🏆.

(6) *I have only been hospitalized once in my life. I was hospitalized when I was 13 years old, in my first year of junior high school. We were all gathered after a soccer game , something strange happened to my body. Suddenly my vision became dark and everything became blurry. My coach noticed something strange about my complexion and called out to me,but I told him I was fine. But then I sat down immediately. My friend's mother , who was a nurse, immediately examined me and said she thought I had heat stroke,so we headed to the hospital in your car. At the hospital, I was diagnosed with dehydration due to heat stroke. Because it was late at night, I was told to stay in the hospital for just one night, so I was admitted. The next day, I was able to leave the hospital thanks to an infusion. What I learned from this incident is that it is important to never forget to replenish with fluids and salt when exercising. Since then, I have been able to get by without suffering from heat stroke, so I feel that this experience has been very useful. Everyone please be careful to avoid heat stroke.*

This set of emoji worked for some of the young adult learners in my context teaching English at a Japanese university. In reflecting on this lesson, writing, and revising this playground, I have more deeply considered the impact of the emoji I selected. Many of the stories told recounted achievements, injuries or illness, frightening experiences, or travel. The memories elicited by emoji may not be directly representative, as with the lock emoji, 🔐, connecting to the idea of money for the teller of story (5). In retrospect, it seems likely that emoji such as 🍻, 💩, and 💞 may invoke memories of experiences that breached the “dark” upper bound of appropriateness (Norrick, 2005). Furthermore, there is no inherent need to provide the learners with the spread. The students could be tasked with choosing several emoji from the full set that they find evocative and contribute their choices into a collaboratively developed spread. This process might also help in determining the upper bounds of appropriateness, so that the learners could decide for themselves where that is. Exploring the negotiated boundaries of appropriateness and tellability and how learners manage their identities in such a context is an interesting avenue for future research. I also did not explore the degree to which students' English proficiency, or confidence in their ability contributed to the stories they ultimately decided to tell. In a learning environment this relationship may also be an important consideration when deciding on storytelling prompts. It is possible that some students who opted to write and recite, as opposed to speak and transcribe as directed, did so due to a lack of confidence in their speaking. Investigating this relationship may help to find the most appropriate prompts that encourage students to develop their extemporaneous speaking ability.

This academic community playground has given me a fun, deeply engaging, and educational **SPACE** (York, 2023) to play as a playful novice academic. It is a space where I felt **S**afe to **P**articipate due to the high standards of the open peer review policy and supportive network within the LLP community of practice. It has given me **A**gency by encouraging me to play in the first place and **C**ritically reflect on my teaching context, goals, and **E**xperiences and how those might become resources for others in the LLP community and more broadly to teachers, learners, researchers, and storytellers. I hope that you find these materials useful or inspiring, or otherwise find space to play in your own teaching.

## Dedication

This playground is dedicated to Bill Labov, who passed away while the paper was under revision. He was the mentor of my mentor, Anne Charity Hudley. I rediscovered his work while studying narrative in my MA. In that discovery, he changed the way I teach storytelling, which led me to realize the deep relevance that oral narratives have to myself, my students, and all of us thinking apes. I did not know him personally, but I feel the waves of impact he has had on our world and I think I can say he shortened the moral arc of the universe, making it bend a bit more sharply toward justice.

As a highly influential scholar, his work will endure and the meaning he helped bring to light will shine long into the future. I hope this dedication also highlights the personal impact he has had, both directly to all who knew him and indirectly through all the people he has reached. Thank you, Bill Labov.

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## Appendix 1 Task series leading up to and surrounding the lesson in which the materials appear

| Unit, Lesson | Pedagogical Task | Notes and Details |
|---|---|---|
| Unit 1 focused on autobiographical language and familiarizing students with the same general cycle of tasks repeated (and seen below) in Units 2 and 3. | | |
| Unit 2,<br>Lesson 6 “🧳Travel Stories⛵”<br><br>Each lesson is 90 minutes in length.<br><br>Actual time allotted to each task was flexible. | Task 1 (T1): Attendance prompt: “Where did you go for your school trips?” | Attendance prompts combine the required administrative work of taking attendance with priming the students for the following group discussion activity. |
| | **Speaking Task 2**<br>T2: 10 minute chat: Talk about your school trips. | Every lesson starts with a relatively free conversation activity in groups of 3 or 4 students. Unit 1 introduced peer interaction skills for enhancing the learning potential of these activities. |
| | T3: Reflect and discuss the 10 minute chat | Reflection activities are included to encourage students to engage in metacognitive strategies and follow-up on communicative or language difficulties encountered during less structured communication. |

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| | T4: Listen to the instructor's travel story. | The instructor (me) tells a true story of a recent travel experience, providing students with an expert example of language use for a similar task as the 10 minute chat above. The telling is recorded so that it can be examined and listened to again.<br><br>The students are instructed to listen for a general understanding. |
| | T5: Check understanding with peers | Students are encouraged to help each other develop their understanding of my story by using any resources available during the time allotted. |
| | T6: Listen to the recording of the instructor's travel story. | Playing the recording of the story (from T4) gives learners a chance to listen again and confirm their understanding of the story meaning they developed with their peers.<br><br>The students are also instructed to listen so that they can ask follow-up questions about the story. |
| | T7: Ask the instructor follow-up questions about the story or related information. | Students ask questions on a volunteer basis, but are awarded participation points (30% of their course grade) for attempting a question. |
| | T8: Reflect and discuss the instructor's travel story | Students are encouraged to engage in metacognitive strategies, comparison between their own travel stories and the instructor's story in terms of content, structure, and language, and begin planning how to improve their own stories. |
| | T9: Repeat the 10 minute chat | Students change groups and tell their travel stories again. |
| | T10: KWL (Know, Want to Know, Learned) Charts | In the first lesson of each unit students are encouraged to fill out KWL charts to support metacognitive strategies of planning and reflection. |
| Lesson 7<br>"Have you ever? ⛸️& Story Structure 🍔" | T1: Attendance prompt: "Finish the question to ask the instructor: Have you ever _____?"<br><br>T2: 10 minute chat: Talk about your interesting experiences<br><br>T3: Reflect and discuss the 10 minute chat | T1 includes one of the few instances of focus on a particular language form in this course. I include the L1 gloss for this phrase, example sentences, and a brief reminder of the verb forms used. |
| | T4: Oral story structure explanation | I briefly explain the background of Labov's work and how the model came to be, and then summarize the six parts. Then I describe how the burger metaphor fits this model. |
| | T5: Check understanding with peers | |
| | T6: Matching the instructor's story to the | The students determine which parts of the instructor's story from T4 in the previous lesson fit each part of the model. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | burger model | |
| | T7: Introducing the inspiration materials | The concept of brainstorming is introduced along with the emoji inspiration materials and a list of questions (see section 2.2) for helping students recall tellable stories. |
| | T8: Brainstorming and planning | Students are encouraged to write notes and check unknown vocabulary words, but not to write out the story in full. |
| | T9: Storytelling in groups | Students use their ideas from T7 and notes from T8 to tell a story from their lives to their group members. |
| | T10: Peer feedback | Students are encouraged to give feedback in the form of follow-up questions, requests for clarification, and suggestions for improvement including corrective feedback where possible. |
| Homework | T11: Reflection and planning for recording | The recording gives students an opportunity to try speaking again under less pressure and after considering the criteria on which they will ultimately be graded. |
| | T12: Students record their story | |
| | T13: Transcribe 90 seconds of recording | Through transcription the students become more familiar with their speech patterns and actual spoken performance and may become aware of gaps in their ability. Submission of the transcript and recording is 2.5% of their course grade. |
| Lesson 8 "🤝Collaborative Storytelling Games🔮" | In brief, students play games similar to Rory's Story Cubes and collaborate to produce creative stories, then retell the stories to other groups. | This lesson is the subject of ongoing research into creativity, peer interaction, and collaborative storytelling games. It gives the students another type of story (creative) which they may present for their unit-final speaking performance. Finally, it gives me extra time to give detailed individual feedback on all of the students' submissions from T11-T13. |
| Lesson 9 "👷Story work and retelling🔁" | T1: Attendance prompt<br><br>T2: 10 minute chat<br><br>T3: Reflect and discuss the 10 minute chat. | |
| | T4: Discuss instructor's corrective feedback | Students are instructed to explain the feedback they received to their group members if they understood it, and to ask their peers for help understanding feedback that they did not comprehend on their own, and also to compare the kind of feedback they received. |
| | T5: Story text reconstruction | This was a focused-task designed to increase awareness of English discourse markers used in narratives. Based on my close reading of student work, this was a common area of need for the students. So, I designed it in the previous week following individual feedback. |
| | T6: Revision of collaborative storytelling work | Students reviewed the stories they produced in Lesson 8 and were given an opportunity to revise them based on feedback and focused task work. |

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| | T7: Retelling stories | Students retold the revised stories from T6. |
| Homework | T8: Self-assessment | Students used a rubric to self-assess storytelling from Lesson 7, T11-T13. The rubric is based on the same criteria I use to grade their performance in the following lesson. |
| | T9: Revision of storytelling work | Students are encouraged to revise and practice telling the stories they have prepared for the speaking performance in the following lesson. |
| Lesson 10 "Speaking Performance 2: 🍔Storytelling🔮" | T1: Practice<br>T2: Peer feedback | Students are given five minutes to practice and give each other feedback on the story they will present in T3. |
| | T3: Perform in front of the class | Students tell the story they have prepared in front of the class for 5% of their course grade. |
| | T4: Peer assessment/feedback | Students assess or provide feedback to each of their classmates, which may also help improve their own language awareness. |
| | T5: Unit reflection | Students reflect on their learning and experiences throughout the unit. |
| Unit 3 follows the same general cycle of activities to focus on talking about the future. | | |

## Appendix 2. Text of a former student's memorable vending machine story[7]

*Hello, I'll talk to Memorable experience.*
*I was high school student.*
*one day, on the way back, riding bicycle and think*
*want to something to drink.*
*Goto Vending machine.*
*one point, I'm indecisiveness, I mean really indecisiveness.*
*At first I wanted peach nectar with sweet peach flavor. But it was a hot summer day and I wanted a soda.*
*I agonized over it for a long time.*
*But I made a decision take a bet.*
*I pushed two button at once.*
*The first button selected Peach Nectar, and the second button selected Mistio,a grape-flavored sodas juice.*
*One,two,go!*
*Vending machines answer is welch.*
*Welch!? welch is a grape-flavored, non-sodas juice.I wanted peach flavored or sodas juice.*
*First of all, why did Welch come up!? I was not too convinced and took my welch and left.*
*Welth's flavor is...sweet grape.*
*That's all.Thank you for listening.*

[7] The student provided a re-recording of this story along with the transcript upon request. It is available in the supplementary materials.