

THE POTENTIAL OF A WEB-BASED COMIC STRIP FOR SCENARIO RECONSTRUCTION AND CREATIVE WRITING

Z: "The weather's getting worse."

A: "We have to go home soon."

Z: "But I don't know the way..."

A: "I'll look it up on my smart phone."

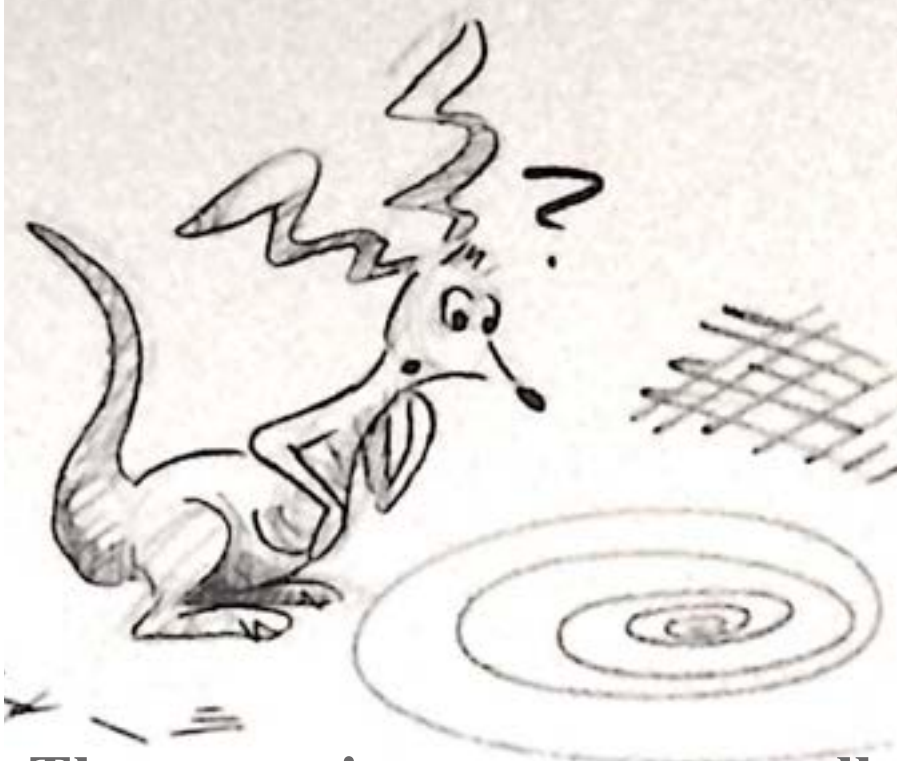
A: "There's a telescope over there!"

Z: "It's a big field."

A: "I wonder where we are..."

**LEE ARNOLD
JALT LEARNER
DEVELOPMENT SIG
JALT CALL 2022
LEARNER DEVELOPMENT
SIG FORUM**

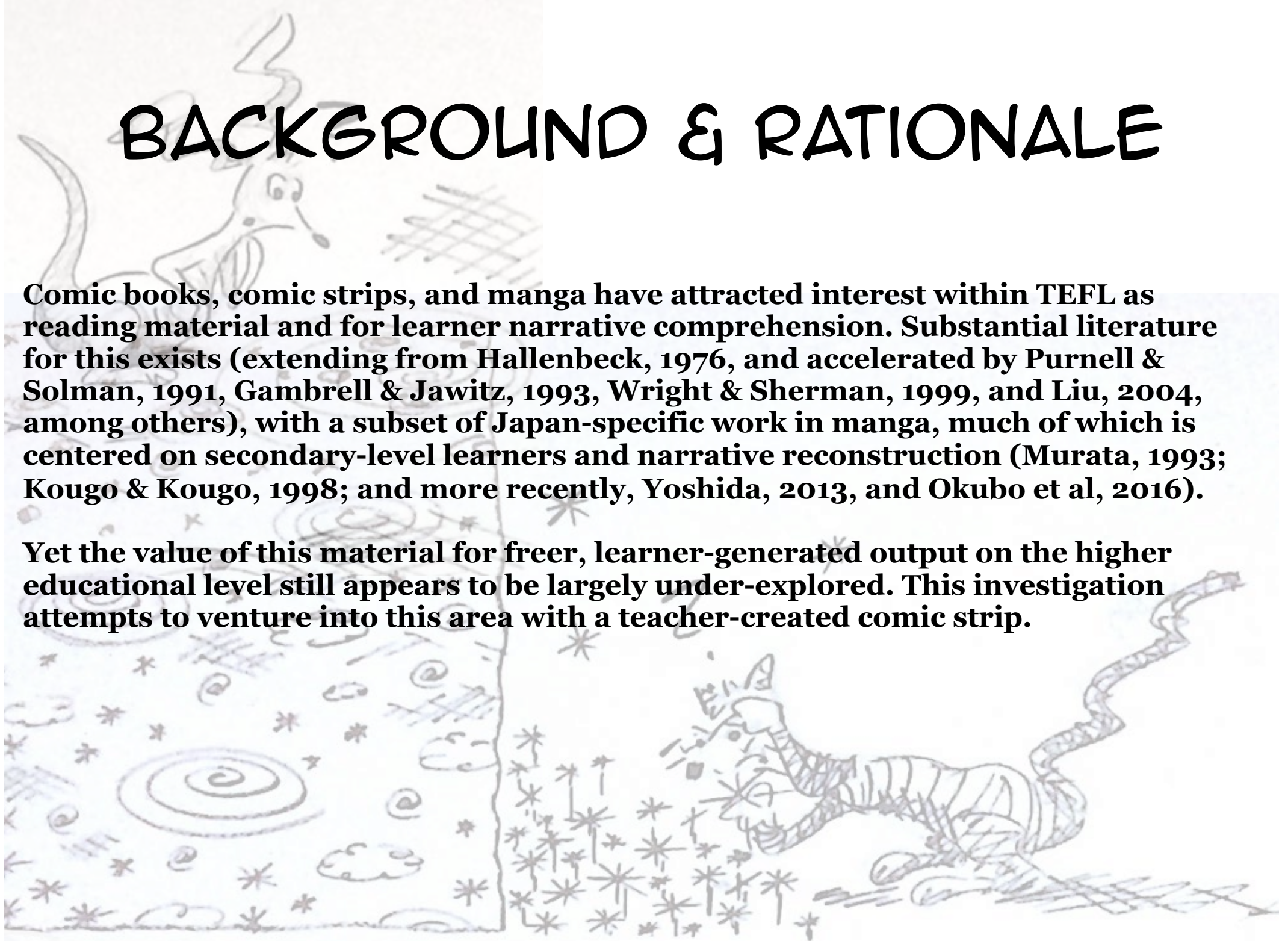
They were in a swampy, small pile of earth, where even the best mobile phones had no signal. And the sky was covered with weird clouds. There were no other animals or people to be seen, and strange statues were scattered everywhere.



BACKGROUND & RATIONALE

Comic books, comic strips, and manga have attracted interest within TEFL as reading material and for learner narrative comprehension. Substantial literature for this exists (extending from Hallenbeck, 1976, and accelerated by Purnell & Solman, 1991, Gambrell & Jawitz, 1993, Wright & Sherman, 1999, and Liu, 2004, among others), with a subset of Japan-specific work in manga, much of which is centered on secondary-level learners and narrative reconstruction (Murata, 1993; Kougo & Kougo, 1998; and more recently, Yoshida, 2013, and Okubo et al, 2016).

Yet the value of this material for freer, learner-generated output on the higher educational level still appears to be largely under-explored. This investigation attempts to venture into this area with a teacher-created comic strip.



TEACHING CONTEXTS

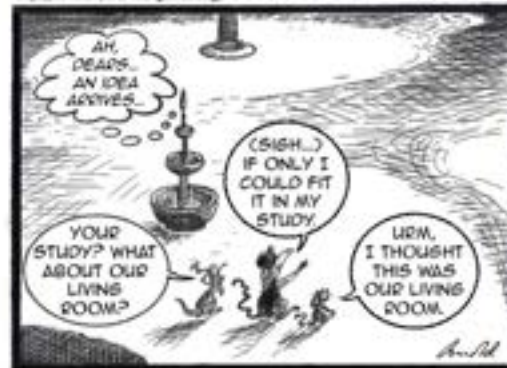
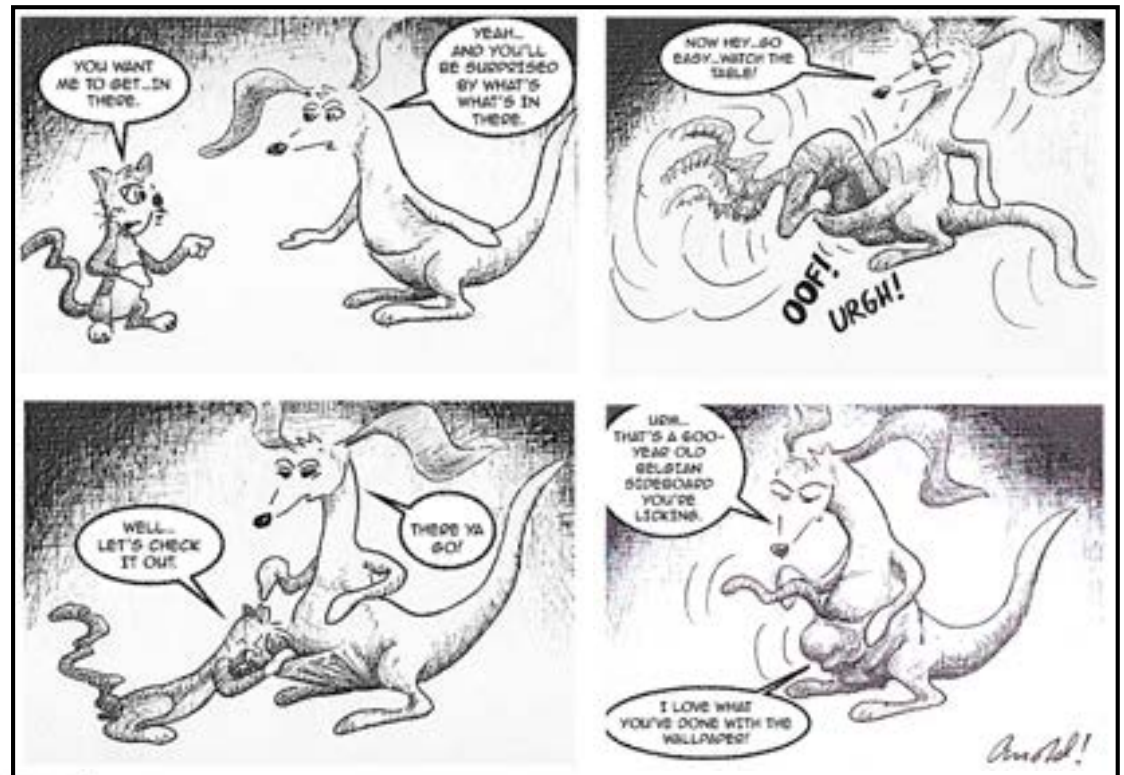
This exploration was conducted at two universities in the Tokyo area - one private scientific and technological institution, and the applied science faculty of another private institution - with first-year learners across five different compulsory courses.

Three of the courses were in communicative reading and writing, one in listening and speaking, and another in writing and composition. This was carried out as second semester-end final activities for AY 2021 after compulsory assignments for assessment had been completed and submitted in all courses.

It was conceived and carried out as a final “fun” activity in the concluding classes of the courses. The learners were targeted specifically for the fact that the activity would have no connection with their regular coursework and would serve as a “cooling-down”, to elongate their comprehension, discussion, and writing into a wholly new area that be light-hearted, yet engaging and meaningful.

MATERIAL CONTEXT

The basis of the comic strip, *The Amazing Zoot & Algy*, was conceived by the presenter at the end of 2019 as a purely recreational activity for private sharing among family, friends, colleagues, and associates on social media, first on Facebook and more recently Instagram, and on a creators' self-publishing site, Ko-fi.



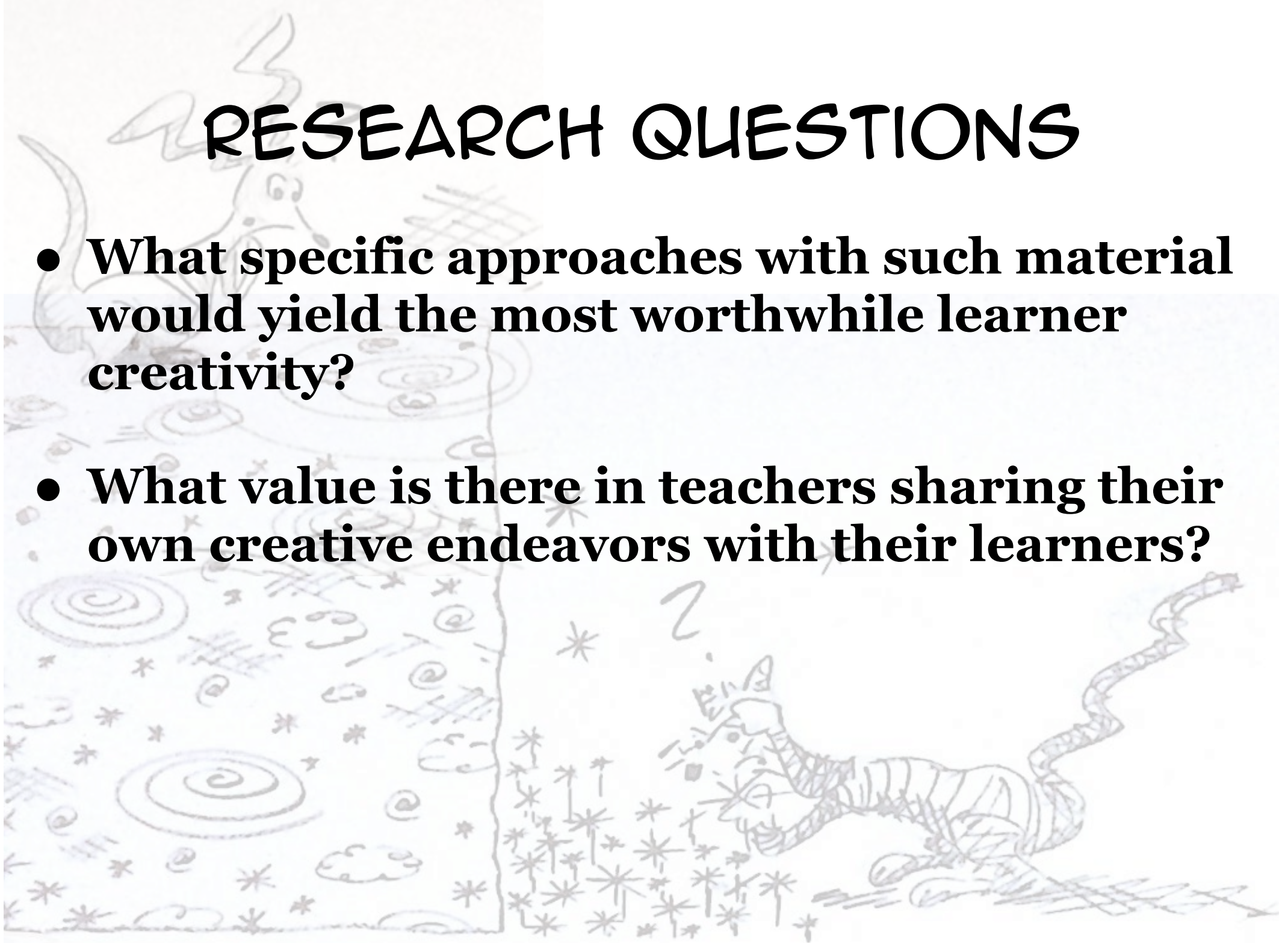
The strip above is as it was drawn and scanned in early conception.

The strip has undergone development since first drawn and the medium has changed from scanned pen-on-sketch pad work to fully digital artwork on an iPad with a program called Procreate.

The strip to the left is as it is currently drawn digitally.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

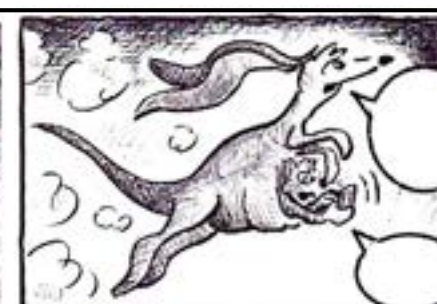
- **What specific approaches with such material would yield the most worthwhile learner creativity?**
- **What value is there in teachers sharing their own creative endeavors with their learners?**



MATERIAL TREATMENT

Involved previously-shared early strips on Facebook with dialog removed. Eight strips were selected forming rough mini-stories uploaded in PDFs to two LMSs.

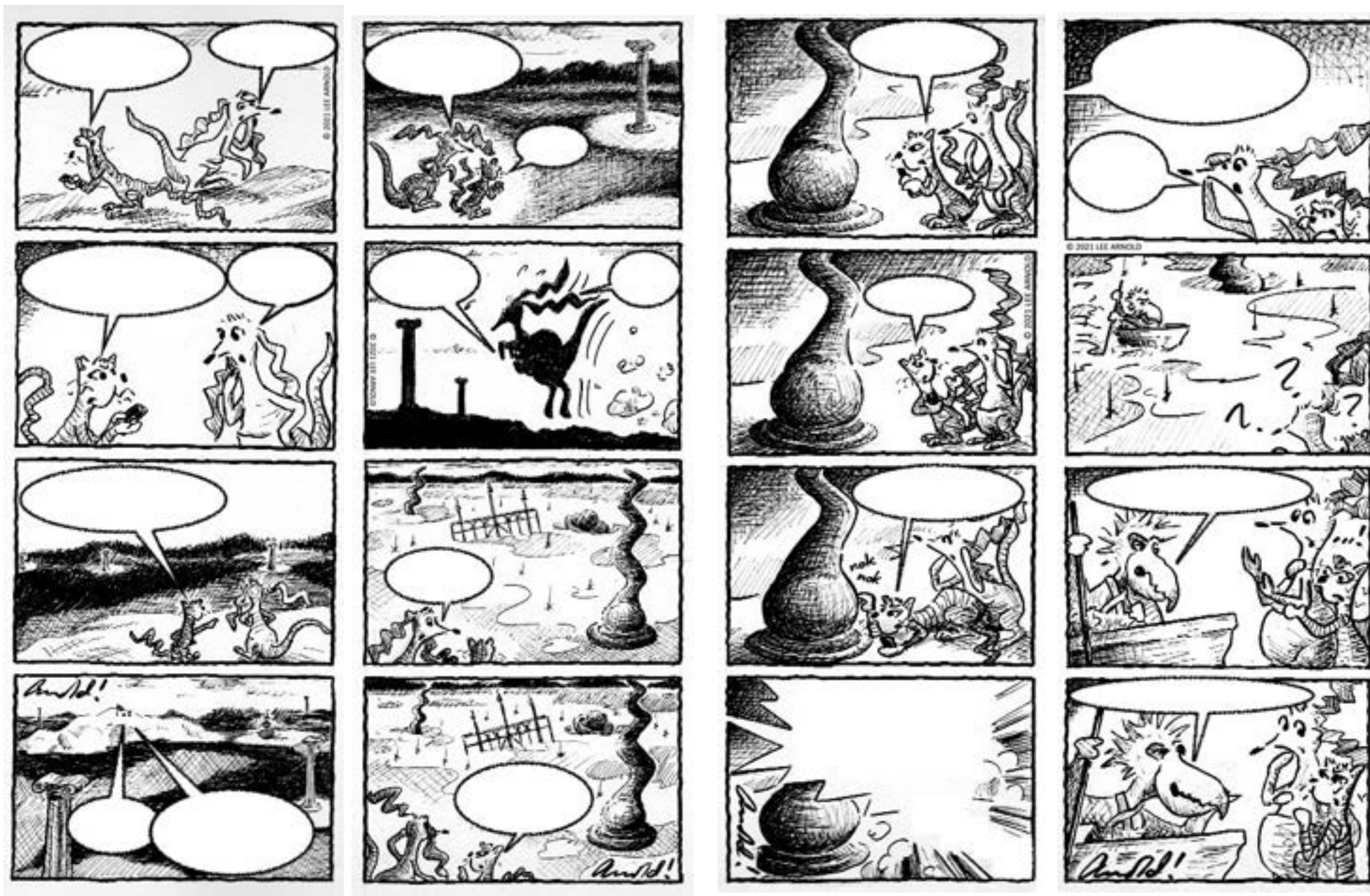
Learners could select at least two of the strips to 1) prepare own contextual framing for scenario, mood, and discovery, then 2) write original dialog based on framing, either via supplemental Word documents or input directly on LMS.



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LEARNER SAMPLES WITH CONTEXTUAL FRAMING

Final fun activity

Otsukaresamadeshita for your hard work this year! Let's now do a final fun activity! On the other PDF you see on [REDACTED] you will see four cartoons from a comic strip I have been drawing and publishing on my personal Facebook page for the last two years. The comic strip is called *Zoot & Algy* (ズートとアルジー). It has two main characters – Zoot, a kangaroo and Algy, a cat. Zoot has very large ears, and Algy has a smartphone that is more powerful than any other smartphone in the world. They have been thrown into a very strange world where they go on adventures. But nothing terrible happens to them, and there are laughs!

Task - Scene & Setting (場面、背景)

You will see on the other PDF that there are four cartoons. They are labeled #1, #2, #3, and #4. But before anything, we need to think about some things – about where Zoot and Algy are, what kind of situation (場合、境遇) they are in, and so on. Now here are the steps for this activity – but first, don't forget to put your name below!

Your Name: [REDACTED]

1. Environment & Place

Look at cartoon #1. In the space below, write about the kind of place you think they are in. What kind of place do you think this is? What kind of weather or climate is in this place? Do you think there are any other animals or people in this place? Write what comes to your mind as you look at the environment they are in. Use your imagination!

They were in a swampy, small pile of earth, where even the best mobile phones had no signal. And the sky was covered with weird clouds. There were no other animals or people to be seen, and strange statues were scattered everywhere.

2. Action

Now go to cartoon #2. In the space below, what do you think they decide to do? How do they move around? Where do you think they will go? Write what comes to your mind as you look at what they do. Use your imagination!

They wanted to get out of this creepy land right now, but they couldn't find any way, so they approached the mysterious statue. When they approached the statue, they went through a warp and found themselves in a place that looked like the ruins of a castle. They are now going to explore this place to find a way out.

3. Discovery (発見)

Now look at cartoon #3. In the space below, where do they go and what do you think they find? What ideas do you think they have about the things they find? What happens that is surprising or shocking to them? Write what comes to your mind as you look at what they find and how they react. Use your imagination!

At the site of the new castle, there was a statue with a wiggly shape. They had been able to warp close to the statue earlier, so they decided to approach it again and try to move. But nothing happened as they approached it, so they cautiously and fearfully touched it, when they heard a very bright light and a loud explosion.

4. Conclusion

Now go to the last cartoon - #4. In the space below, who do they meet? What does who they meet look like? How does he or she come to them? What does he or she say to them? Write what comes to your mind as you look at who they meet and what is said. Use your imagination!

A pelican named Mike was paddling his boat and asked me what I was doing there. Mike was a former inhabitant of the land, with a big beak and a fine mane, and he wore green clothes. He told them angrily that this was the site of a castle that had belonged to a great man and that they should not enter it.

Hello!

Otsukaresamadeshita on the final assignment and review to all of you! Thank you for your great work in this class under this difficult situation since September. For the very last thing we will do for this semester, this is something strictly outside of our regular coursework, and I hope that you will find it fun and unusual, but creative and interesting - a creative free writing activity involving a comic strip.

Activity

On the PDF below you will see four (4) cartoons from a comic strip I have been drawing and publishing on my personal Facebook page for the last two years. The comic strip is called *Zoot & Algy* (ズートとアルジー).

It has two main characters – Zoot, a kangaroo and Algy, a cat. Zoot has very large ears, and Algy has a smartphone that is more powerful than any other smartphone in the world. They have been thrown into a very strange world where they go on adventures. But nothing terrible happens to them, and there are laughs!

Here is the PDF with the cartoons you can download:

 Cartoons #1-4
Cartoons #1-4.pdf - 2022/01/12 22:15:40

1. Environment & Place

Look at cartoon #1. In the space below, write about the kind of place you think they are in. You can talk about this with each other as well! What kind of place do you think this is? What kind of weather or climate is in this place? Do you think there are any other animals or people in this place? Write what comes to your mind as you look at the environment they are in. Use your imagination!

(Required)

1.1

I think they are on Mars or some other planet. And it feels a bit arid and desert like. I think there might be aliens here...

2. Action

Now go to cartoon #2. In the space below, what do you think they decide to do? How do they move around? Where do you think they will go? Write what comes to your mind as you look at what they do. Use your imagination! (Talk about it if you like!)

(Required)

1.2

They decided to move on to the mysterious T shaped tower. They jumped and moved to the tower. And as I approached, I saw various objects lying around. Among them, they were curious about the wiggly tower and decided to get even closer.

3. Discovery (発見)

Now look at cartoon #3. In the space below, where do they go and what do you think they find? What ideas do you think they have about the things they find? What happens that is surprising or shocking to them? Write what comes to your mind as you look at what they find and how they react. Use your imagination! (Talk about this too if you like!)

(Required)

1.3

They went to the wiggly tower and decided to touch it with some trepidation as it felt strange. Then the base of the tower exploded!

4. Conclusion (結 束)

Now go to the last cartoon - #4. In the space below, who do they meet? What does who they meet look like? How does he or she come to them? What does he or she say to them? Write what comes to your mind as you look at who they meet and what is said. Use your imagination!

(Required)

1.4

A crow-like creature appears on a boat. My guess is that he's a wizard or something, and he's going to grant some of Zoot's and Algy's requests.

LEARNER SAMPLES WITH CREATED DIALOG

Dialog

You will see that all the cartoons have speech balloons, where the characters talk to each other. I have blocked out what they say to each other because I would like you to guess what they say!

Now choose one or two of the cartoons (one is okay if you do not have time!). What do you think they are saying? In the space below, write in dialog for each cartoon. (Please remember – Zoot is the kangaroo, and Algy is the cat!) You can make this box space bigger if you need to.
Special note: If you do two cartoons, label which ones they are (#1, or #2, and so on).

1

①Zoot: I'm lost, where am I?

Algy: I'm new here too and I don't know...

②Zoot: Can you find out where I am with your smart phone?

Algy: I'm sorry, I can't find you, I've got no signal.

③Algy: There's a funny shaped statue over there!

④Zoot: It's a bit far, but I'll go!

Algy: Yeah, let's do it!

2

①Zoot: We're getting close, but we'll have to jump across this swamp to get to the foot of the statue.

Algy: That's right.

②Zoot: Hold on tight!

Algy: Thanks!

③Zoot: Where are we?

④Algy: I think we've gone into a warp, it looks like the site of a castle.

Task 2 - Dialog

You will see on the PDF that all the cartoons have speech balloons, where the characters talk to each other. I have blocked out what they say to each other because I would like you to guess what they say!

Now choose one or two of the cartoons (one is okay if you do not have time!). What do you think they are saying? In the space below, write in dialog for the cartoon(s), label who is talking - Z (for Zoot) and A (for Algy), and so on. (Please remember – Zoot is the kangaroo, and Algy is the cat!)

Special note: If you do two cartoons, label which ones they are (#1, or #2, and so on).

(Required)

1.5

Z: We need to get to that tower over there!

A: Yeah, right!

Z: Algy's as heavy as ever...

A: Zoot's pouch is always comfortable! ;)

Z: We've reached our destination!

A: There's a lot of stuff, but I'm curious about that tower...

#3

A: My guess is that there's something in here...!

A: Let's just check it out.

A: Hello, is anyone here...?

LEARNER SAMPLES WITH CONTEXTUAL FRAMING

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It looks like an unknown planet with a developed civilization. There is no rain there, and the temperature is very suitable for living things. The creatures on that planet are sensitive to danger, and they hide.

2. Action

Now go to cartoon #2. In the space below, what do you think they decide to do? How do they move around? Where do you think they will go? Write what comes to your mind as you look at what they do. Use your imagination!

To fetch water, Zoot put Algy in his tummy bag and headed for the lake.

3. Discovery (発見)

Now look at cartoon #3. In the space below, where do they go and what do you think they find? What ideas do you think they have about the things they find? What happens that is surprising or shocking to them? Write what comes to your mind as you look at what they find and how they react. Use your imagination!

They found a strange shaped object in the lake. They figured it was a creature of that planet. When they tried to communicate, suddenly someone yelled at them.

4. Conclusion

Now go to the last cartoon - #4. In the space below, who do they meet? What does who they meet look like? How does he or she come to them? What does he or she say to them? Write what comes to your mind as you look at who they meet and what is said. Use your imagination!

The indigenous creature is angry because the object belongs to him. He came on a ship and warned them not to steal the precious object.

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(Required)

1.1

I thought of Zoot as being in distress in some sort of desert hill. They passed each other under a clear sky and I thought Zoot was asking Algy for directions. And I thought that Algy was advising him to head towards the tower-like object over there.

2. Action

Now go to cartoon #2. In the space below, what do you think they decide to do? How do they move around? Where do you think they will go? Write what comes to your mind as you look at what they do. Use your imagination! (Talk about it if you like!)

(Required)

1.2

They walked, and walked, and walked to their destination. However, it was tough for Algy the cat to walk in the desert, so Zoot the kangaroo put Algy in his pocket and they made their way to their destination. On the way to their destination, they arrived at an oasis. In the oasis, there was a sunken object that looked like a ship's sail, and there was also a spindly object standing nearby.

3. Discovery (発見)

Now look at cartoon #3. In the space below, where do they go and what do you think they find? What ideas do you think they have about the things they find? What happens that is surprising or shocking to them? Write what comes to your mind as you look at what they find and how they react. Use your imagination! (Talk about this too if you like!)

(Required)

1.3

They were curious about a wiggly object they had never seen before; Algy looked it up on his smart phone and couldn't figure out what it was, so he touched the base and the object exploded.

4. Conclusion (結 束)

Now go to the last cartoon - #4. In the space below, who do they meet? What does who they meet look like? How does he or she come to them? What does he or she say to them? Write what comes to your mind as you look at who they meet and what is said. Use your imagination!

(Required)

1.4

When they heard the explosion, a bird came to them from the depths of the oasis in a boat. The bird asked them who had destroyed the object. Actually, the object belonged to the bird. The two pointed at each other as the bird asked which of them had broken it.

LEARNER SAMPLES WITH CREATED DIALOG

Dialog

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#1

Zoot: What happened?
Algy: Where are we?
A: Look at this! There's no signal down here.
Z: Is this Earth?
A: I see a big pillar over there.
Z: There's a lot more.
A: There's some kind of civilization developing here.

Task 2 - Dialog

You will see on the PDF that all the cartoons have speech balloons, where the characters talk to each other. I have blocked out what they say to each other because I would like you to guess what they say!

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Special note: If you do two cartoons, label which ones they are (#1, or #2, and so on).

(Required)

1.5

#2

A: I'm tired of walking. Please put me in your pocket.
Z: I don't have a choice.
Z: That's pretty far.
A: Yes, it is. It's going to be night soon.
Z: It's getting dark, so let's rest here today.
A: I guess so. But if you had put it in your pocket earlier, we could have gotten there in the evening.

#3

A: It's an object I've never seen before. Let's check it out.
A: It doesn't look like anything to me.
A: I wonder what's inside.



annotated
strip
samples

LEARNER REACTIONS

I think it's interesting homework, but it was a little too difficult for me.

There were so many descriptions of strange places that it was a bit confusing to imagine them, but I really enjoyed thinking about what kind of stories I could tell.

I think doing this activity will help me to have a richer imagination.

This activity is fun. It was interesting to read the information from the pictures and to put it into a good story, like a puzzle. I looked up some English expressions to help me think about dialogue. Many of the expressions were easy to use, so I thought I would like to use them in English conversation.

It's fantastic. I haven't have such homework so far, so it was a lot of fun. I wanted to read various other cartoon.

It was a very interesting activity, but I felt that there was too little information in the manga. I think it would have been more interesting if there was more room for imagination in the manga.

Because I've never thought of the situation myself, so this work was a lot of fun!

I think it's an interesting activity. You may think it's too much to do every time, but I think it can be interesting to do it sometimes. Also, it is an activity that can develop imagination.

LEARNER REACTIONS

I had never thought about comic book dialogue before, and it was difficult, but an interesting experience.

Zoot and Algy are both very expressive and cute. The expression on their faces in the third panel of #4 is wide-eyed, and I can see how surprised they are. What I thought was particularly cute were Zoot's long, wavy ears. They look like a girl's twin tails.

It was fun because I don't usually do this kind of thing.

I finished all of them, and my writing skills have improved a lot.

I thought it was very interesting that this activity tested the imagination and different people could do different things. Please keep doing this activity!

I've never drawn my own manga before, so I feel like my horizons have been broadened. I've never read foreign comics.

I think it is interesting to think about script of cartoon. At first, I thought that everyone would only have similar script. However, after exchanging opinions with others on zoom, I realized that everyone had interesting idea that I can't find. The picture we are looking at is the same, but our ideas are not same. This is very interesting. Therefore, I found out that it is very important to exchange ideas with others.

It was easy to see the situation in pictures and understand it, but it was difficult to put it into words, which required fun as well.

OVERVIEW

- **Learners enjoyed this activity and often reported how it stretched their imagination**
- **They nonetheless found it challenging**
- **They enjoyed strip artwork but some struggled with “seeing” natural context in it**
- **They nonetheless could create sense of context through their own framing**
- **Such contextual framing may have opened space for learner agency to come to play**

OVERVIEW

- **Learners did not specifically note about the novelty of the strip being created by the teacher.**
- **Presenter risked vulnerability by sharing such creative effort with learners but their reaction to material deemed it successful**
- **Presenter nonetheless felt enhanced sense of satisfaction with overall learner engagement with material**

**For anyone wishing to know more about this investigation
or even to know what this comic strip is about outside a
TEFL context - email me at:**

washizora@gmail.com

