

The Use of X and Other Creative Ways to Retell Events

by **ALJOHN FRANCIS RUIZ FLORES**

One of the biggest challenges for any reading teacher is to find ways to make students read. Many students do not have enough time to focus on reading, as they must attend to academic demands and take care of other responsibilities outside school. Some students do not read because they are overwhelmed with just the sight of blocks of texts on paper or on their screens. Others find reading challenging because they see a disjoint among the different forms of text, such as the academic language in tests and the informal language in everyday communication. Finally, with the advent of widely available video reels and other short video clips on social media, focusing on reading material for a couple of hours is now considered a feat.

Despite this reality, we must ensure that students are able to comprehend written texts, as this is a fundamental reading skill. Though graphic organizers, collages, timelines, and sequence of events are time-tested and can be effective, these tools and techniques in teaching reading and supporting comprehension can at times seem straightforward and lack creativity, which in effect amplifies students' struggles in reading.

To address this concern, I looked for ways to incorporate contemporary language and information and communication technology to creatively retell stories without jeopardizing the goals and objectives of my lessons. In this article, I show how I have

used Twitter, now referred to as X, and free online post generators to design a reading and literature lesson in my ninth- and tenth-grade English classes in the Philippines. As I explain, using this technique has had a positive effect on my students' ability to understand and explain what they have read (or viewed)—and it has enhanced their motivation for and enjoyment of reading.

The time required for this activity is generally about 30 minutes, depending on the available materials, the ways in which you want to use the technique, and the level of your students—you can easily adapt the technique to make it more or less challenging. It works well if you have computers and an internet connection available, but you can also use this productively with paper and something to write with.

Note that I began using this technique when “Twitter” and “tweets” were still the terms used for this social-media platform and the posts published on it, respectively. For the sake of this discussion and to avoid confusion, I will refer to “Twitter” as “X” and to “tweets” as “posts.”

IMPLEMENTATION

The main point of this technique is to rewrite a narrative as if it were a series of posts. The technique can be used at any point in the lesson or module. Personally, I have used it primarily as follows:

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- during pre-reading to check if the students read the assigned text prior to class discussions;
 - while-reading to discuss important parts of the story and character traits; and
 - during post-reading to check for recall and understanding in tests and to incorporate a creative approach in reading beyond texts.
- **Shepherd** (@YourShepherdBoy): @MrVillageHead still there? I can hear a wolf for real. #sendhelp #911 #SOS
 - **Shepherd** (@YourShepherdBoy): Where y'all townsfolk when I need you? FR. Where are all my sheep??? #sendhelp #sad

When using this technique, you have the option to print out posts and give students individual copies. However, to save on resources, you can simply display the posts on a projector screen and save the printouts for assessments. Again, the technique can serve as a comprehension check while students work through a text, and it can also be used for assessments.

The rationale for integrating posts in reading classes is to develop students' analyzing skills by asking them to look closely into the characters' lines and/or traits in the original text, then reflect their understanding and interpretation in the posts they write. Furthermore, students can practice and demonstrate their skill in translating their understanding of the text into another form, specifically the language they are familiar with and comfortable in using when they text or post.

To illustrate how this technique can be used in practice, below are the key events in Aesop's "The Boy Who Cried Wolf," presented in four posts:

- **Shepherd** (@YourShepherdBoy): What a good day to pull some pranks. #bored #prankster
- **Shepherd** (@YourShepherdBoy): They fell for it! LOL at everyone looking everywhere for a non-existing wolf. #prankster #owooooo

In the sample above, the story was retold from the shepherd's point of view, and unconventional forms of language were used. Fictional X usernames and hashtags, along with slang such as *LOL* (laughing out loud), *y'all* (you all), and *FR* (for real), were some of the elements used to reinforce the notion that the narrative happened in modern times.

Although a large part of this technique is based on reading, it also requires specific writing skills. Learners must restructure the original literary text into modern language, in this case as X posts. In doing so, they must be able to capture a character's traits, motives, and emotions, and perhaps the story's main events and possible theme in 280-character posts. Moreover, the technique requires literacy, especially the skill of using specific elements of contemporary language like hashtags, emojis, and slang appropriate to the context of X.

Please note that this technique is flexible. You can add or subtract elements as you see fit. For example, the posts can be written in complete, conventional, and straightforward sentences, from two or more characters' points of view, or even by a third person.

PROCEDURE

There are two major steps in implementing this technique: (a) preparation and (b) generating posts. In between are smaller steps that you may take depending on the resources available.

I. Preparation

- Identify the essential parts in the assigned text.
- Chunk the assigned text into small units.
- Decide from whose point of view the story will be retold and the posts will be written.
- Think of interesting usernames for the characters. For example, when I was teaching the play *Cyrano de Bergerac*, I used the usernames “@ThePoetCyrano” for Cyrano de Bergerac, “@RoxInLove” for Roxane, “@DeGuy_DeGuiche” for De Guiche, and “@Capuchin_Monk” for the Capuchin. If there are enough resources, adding a profile picture for each character can make the posts more realistic and interesting. My students also watched the 1990 film version of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, directed by Jean-Paul Rappeneau, as an aid to the text, so I used pictures of the cast: Gérard Depardieu for Cyrano and Anne Brochet for Roxane.
- Decide whether the items will be one-way communication by an individual or an exchange of posts between characters using reply chains.
- Rewrite the essential parts of the text into posts. Make sure that each post is within the current 280-character limit. Be creative by using hashtags and emojis, and write in a character’s stream of consciousness for some items.

II. Generating posts

If you decide to generate posts, there are two main options. When no internet connection is available, you can use Microsoft Word or any word-processing application. Otherwise, the most convenient way is through Tweetgen, a free online tool for generating fake posts (<https://www.tweetgen.com/>). Although the name of the website is still based on X’s previous name, it is updated and generally consistent with the current interface of X.

1. Using a word processor:
 - a. Use a table or draw a rectangular-shaped box for each post.
 - b. Paste the profile picture of the character on the left side of the box. (This is optional.)
 - c. Type the full name of the character in bold and the username you thought of. Begin the username with the “@” sign, as in “@ThePoetCyrano.”
 - d. Type the post. You might want to make the font a little bigger than the one used for the name and username.
 - e. When generating an exchange of posts, remember to first type the username of the character being addressed before typing the post.
2. Using Tweetgen:
 - a. Visit <https://www.tweetgen.com/>.
 - b. Select the type of post you want to create: single post, reply chain, block, or suspension.
 - c. When generating a post, select the background color of the post, font type, and emoji style if you decide to include one.
 - d. Click on the elements you want to add. Doing so prompts the upload of a profile picture, typing of name and username, post, time and date, and even the number of reposts, quote posts, and likes.
 - e. Once all the details are filled in, click the “Generate image” button and save the picture on your local drive.

EXAMPLES

Below are examples of posts I have used for different purposes in my English classes. The first example is a set of posts from a single character’s point of view. I used these

for a reading test when I was teaching the novel *Flowers for Algernon*, by Daniel Keyes. This series of posts reflects Charlie Gordon's progress report when he researched further into the experiment he took part in and was slowly showing signs of regression.

- **Charlie Gordon (@CharlieGee):** This insubordinate little creature is driving everyone really mad. #Whattodowithyoualgie
- **Charlie Gordon (@CharlieGee):** Got my own lab! Time to pull an all-nighter huhuhu #research #sendhelp
- **Charlie Gordon (@CharlieGee):** Done with my project. Results are frustrating. This is sad, but what can I do? #sigh #fragile
- **Charlie Gordon (@CharlieGee):** WHY AM I #TRIGGERED FOR NO REASON.

In this next example, I made posts from different characters to discuss the events that took place in Act 1, Scenes 5 to 7, of the play *Cyrano de Bergerac*. These posts reflect Cyrano's dismissal of Le Bret's warning about potential enemies as well as his joy upon knowing that Roxane, his love interest, wanted to meet him.

- **Cyrano de Bergerac (@ThePoetCyrano):** I don't care if they hate me. Got this, bruh @D_Bret.
- **Duenna (@PrettyDuenna):** Hey @ThePoetCyrano, Robin wants to hang out. G? #sayYes
- **Cyrano de Bergerac (@ThePoetCyrano):** @D_Bret fam, BAE knows me. #shookt
- **Ligniere (@LiverLoveBoy):** Need your help @ThePoetCyrano. HUHUUH AM DEAD.

Aside from using this technique with texts my students are reading, I use it as a post-viewing activity. As an enrichment activity to William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*,

my students watched the 1961 movie version of *West Side Story*. Because our English classes were just 50 minutes per session, I allotted two and a half meetings for the viewing activity. During the second session, I gave a short test to check for comprehension. I asked students to arrange the following posts in order, as they appeared in the first part of the film. These posts show what happened during Tony and Maria's first meeting at the neighborhood dance and their famous balcony scene.

- _____ **Bernardo (@Nardo_Sharks):** @Tony_Jets not my sister! #NoAmericansAllowed
- _____ **Riff (@Riff_Jets):** @Nardo_Sharks see you at @Doc's. #YoureDead
- _____ **Tony (@Tony_Jets):** Her name is music to my ears. #startofsomethingnew
- _____ **Tony (@Tony_Jets):** If you're reading this, I'm here in the back alley. Come down or I come up.
- _____ **Maria (@Maria_Sharks):** I'll dream of you. Thanks for dropping by :>

If you are teaching an honors class, however, you may choose to provide two or three posts and let your students fill in the missing parts of the narrative by writing a few more posts. Note that this type of activity will elicit many possible answers. If you want to make the answers more focused, one option is to provide the name of the character(s) the students will write posts for.

- **Bernardo (@Nardo_Sharks):** @Tony_Jets not my sister! #NoAmericansAllowed
- **Riff (@Riff_Jets):** @Nardo_Sharks _____
- **Tony (@Tony_Jets):** Her name is music to my ears. #startofsomethingnew
- **Tony (@Tony_Jets):** @Maria_Sharks _____

**To use this technique in a class of lower-level learners,
you can chunk the text into smaller units and
be more direct and specific in the language used for each post.**

- **Maria** (@Maria_Sharks): @Tony_Jets ____

To use this technique in a class of lower-level learners, you can chunk the text into smaller units and be more direct and specific in the language used for each post. It will also be beneficial to provide scaffolds to lessen students' cognitive load. Below are items anchored on the previous examples. Notice that in this series of posts, I use simpler language, provide more details, and give the answer to one of the items. The hashtags are also more direct and do not require much inferring.

- ____ **Bernardo** (@Nardo_Sharks):
@Tony_Jets stay away from my sister!
#NoToAmericans
- ____ **Maria** (@Maria_Sharks): I'll
dream of you tonight, Tony. Thanks for
visiting me. :">
- __3__ **Tony** (@Tony_Jets): Maria's name
is music to my ears.
- ____ **Tony** (@Tony_Jets): Maria, if
you're reading this, I'm here at the back
alley. Come down or I'll come up.
- ____ **Riff** (@Riff_Jets): @Nardo_
Sharks see you at @Doc's drugstore for the
war council. #YoureDead

VARIATIONS

1. This technique can also be used in listening activities, especially during post-listening to check comprehension.
2. Once your students have become accustomed to this kind of exercise, ask them to retell events by writing their

own posts. For lower-level learners, I suggest that you do scaffolding activities like providing several models to read as well as doing joint-construction activities where you write sample posts with the students before having them work in groups, in pairs, or individually. Depending on your objectives, you may also be lenient with X's 280-character limit. For intermediate and advanced learners, you may choose to skip the writing instruction and proceed straight to asking them to work with their classmates or on their own. Your students might surprise you with their creativity and may even keep you updated with slang and other forms of the language they use. However, for all levels, remind them that since they are retelling events, faithfulness to the text must not be sacrificed.

3. If there are no computers and internet connection available, you can draw X's interface and write posts by hand on large poster paper.
4. As a post-reading activity, you may also ask students to make an alternative ending, prequel, or sequel to the text through posts.
5. You may use this technique for developing research skills like paraphrasing and summarizing. Ask students to explain in their own words a text they have read and condense it into a single post. X's character limit may also help them to be concise and to use clear and specific words.
6. Text messages or an exchange of texts can also be an option instead of posts. There are several free online

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text-message generators that can be used for this purpose. One example is iFake Text Message at <https://ifaketextmessage.com/>.

7. Newspaper headlines are another option. Think of one-sentence headlines for a specific chunk of events and add creativity by including newspaper names for each.

CONCLUSION

Incorporating X in reading classes is a creative way to develop reading skills. It veers away from the traditional way of retelling events by incorporating elements that students are familiar with. The technique goes beyond reading skills, as it also requires specific writing and literacy skills to create posts and an X user identity for a character.

I acknowledge that there may be arguments about teaching writing conventions, especially when some posts use slang. In this case, it is best to revisit your learning objectives and your rationale in employing this technique. Do your learning objectives require students to do formal writing—or to appreciate literature by finding text-to-self, text-to-text, or text-to-world connections? If you are sure of your objectives and the best ways to help students achieve them, then you can decide whether to be strict or lenient with writing conventions.

When I started using this technique, I saw a positive change in my students' attitudes towards reading classes and reading in general. They started to look forward to discussing their assigned readings, smiled and giggled when X was used in their tests, and even discussed the items after class. Aside from

that, I noticed a significant improvement in their reading test scores. Many of them would get an almost perfect, if not perfect, score for items that would require them to sequence posts.

Although using this technique has required a little more time and effort on my part, as I must keep myself updated on students' language use and interests, the positive results make everything worth it. There were times when students would praise my use of modern language in our classes, and there were also times when I would get educated on slang and their usage in different contexts and situations. Personally, I can say that those were my life-giving moments as a teacher because I made my students more involved in the learning process. After all, there is nothing teachers are afraid to do and try just to help their students fall in love not just with reading but also with learning.

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