**Assessment Task for Speaking**

**Topic: Story Competition**

This assessment task focuses on developing senior secondary students’ speaking skills.

This set of materials consists of Question Paper and Suggested Answers.

**Speaking Task: Story Competition**

**Situation:**

Your work in a youth agency called Young Power, which seeks to encourage students to use English outside the classroom. Building on the successful experience in organising a story competition some years ago, your seniors would like to do something similar this year to make English learning more fun.

The following is the notice about the story competition last held by Young Power.

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| **Young Power**  **Short Story Competition**  The competition aims to stimulate students’ imagination and provide them with a good opportunity to improve their English skills.  This year entrants must submit ghost stories with the titles “The Open Door”, “The Payment” or “Ice Cold”. The stories must be more than 2,500 and less than 3,000 words in length.  Entrants must be under 18 on 31st July 2012.  The stories must be new. Entrants must declare they have received no outside help and have not used material from any other sources.  A prize of HK$5,000 will be awarded to the winner. The panel of three judges will award marks for   * Correct and beautiful language * Skilful characterisation * Ghostly atmosphere   Deadline for receipt of entries: 12 noon, 31st July 2012 |

**Part A: Group Interaction**

You are asked to discuss with your colleagues how to adapt the above notice for use this year.

You may want to talk about:

* whether you want to keep the same aims or replace them with others
* whether it is better to allow entrants freedom of choice for the topic or follow the examples in the notice
* whether to keep the same list of areas to receive marks
* anything else you think is important

**Part B: Individual Response**

It is decided that a briefing session for the entrants will be held. Your seniors have asked you to conclude the session by relating story writing to students’ daily experiences. Rehearse your part by answering the following question.

* 1. Is writing short stories a useful activity for secondary school students?
  2. Why are ghost stories so popular?
  3. What type of short story do you enjoy the most?
  4. What difficulties do you have when asked to write a short story?

**END OF QUESTION PAPER**

**Suggested Ideas for Group Interaction and Individual Response**

**Part A Group Discussion**

* **whether you want to keep the same aims or replace them with others**
* Imagination is important in everyone’s life as it helps us see new possibilities and solutions to problems, and it is especially important in a knowledge-based economy as we need to think of new products and designs and find new ways to make them attractive to others.
* I don’t think anyone can deny that plenty of writing helps when learning or improving our skills in any language. As short stories are written in so many different styles, writing them can help in different ways, and the use of description can encourage the use of new vocabulary items.
* I’d like to make it sound a bit less serious. Can’t we say that writing short stories is fun and we want to encourage people to enjoy thinking of stories, writing them and sharing?
* You cannot write good stories unless you read them too, so one aim of a short story competition must be to encourage people to read and enjoy short stories.
* There’s no point in writing a story that no one else reads so the competition is also a way to help people share their work.
* **whether it is better to allow entrants freedom of choice for the topic or follow the examples in the notice**
* Writers will probably prefer to have freedom so they can enter the best stories they have written recently whether or not they are ghost stories, and the judges won’t get bored reading so many similar stories. But it will be much harder to pick the best when the stories have so many different styles, themes and qualities. Perhaps setting a theme then is a good idea to make it easier to compare the entries, but possibly actual titles are unnecessary. Maybe a title should come last and arise from a story rather than be its source.
* **whether to keep the same list of areas to receive marks**
* Correct language is a good aim for language users, especially learners, but stories may need to contain a lot of informal words and expressions to get an authentic tone. Possibly it should not be too important in the judging as it is not too difficult to find someone to do some proofreading and editing.
* “Beautiful language” is very hard to define. A rough style might suit some topics.

Maybe “suitability of style” would be a better way of expressing it.

* For stories with characters, good characterisation is important, but what about stories without? Do we insist the stories entered must have characters?
* Should something be said about “interest”?
* **anything else you think is important**
* Should there be rules about presentation, use of illustration and such matters?
* Is there any plan to publish the best stories in any form?
* How will the results be published?

**Part B Individual Response**

1. Is writing short stories a useful activity for secondary school students?

*I can understand that some people might say that it isn’t directly useful for most subjects on the curriculum or for future careers in the major sectors of the economy such as financial services, hospitality, import-export trade and tourism. But I don’t think primary or secondary education should only be practical. Works of imagination and fiction play a big role in our lives and should be a part of education too. Stories and fiction are fun and can give students motivation to read, write and pay attention to language. When you are keen to express an idea or describe something you have a good reason to use dictionaries and ask for help with words. Fiction also encourages dreaming and imagining the world as different. That might lead to positive changes. We need more story writing - not less.*

1. Why are ghost stories so popular?

*Yes, we like being frightened in a safe way. We love going to cinemas to see horror stories and ghost films with really frightening special effects. And when we are out camping we tell each other about scary happenings. Vampires and zombies are a fashion nowadays. Maybe we use them to express some of our deepest fears which we don’t want to talk about. They help us think about the evil in the world, without actually being in danger. By listening to or watching a ghost story and being okay at the end we learn to control our fears and be a little bit more ready to face something real. I don’t think most people who enjoy ghost stories really believe in ghosts, but they aren’t quite sure. Perhaps more simply we enjoy the feeling of relief when the film or story ends and we go out into the ordinary world. You need to be hungry to enjoy food. You need to be scared to enjoy safety.*

1. What type of short story do you enjoy the most?

*There are many ways to classify stories. You can use the topic - history, the supernatural, romance, family drama, science fiction, war, crime and so on. I prefer the less realistic types. Stories about modern life, study problems and pollution, for example, are very valuable and help us think about our lives, but I prefer something more fantastic like dinosaurs, strange aliens on distant worlds, magicians, elves, or knights with amazing swords fighting for their king or love. I like suspense in stories. I enjoy a clever twist at the end which really surprises me, but my main interest is plot, like a hero facing challenges, struggling and at the last moment winning and having a happy ending. That’s my favourite type of story.*

1. What difficulties do you have when asked to write a short story?

*I usually read some examples of the sort of story to be written and think about the usual ingredients for making that type. So the basic form of the story is not really a problem. The biggest problem of all comes next - thinking of the content. Sometimes my mind is a blank or I have lots of ideas which I soon realise are all far too common and obvious. I try to get the brain to work by jotting down words that come to mind, surfing the Internet - that sort of thing. But it still takes a long time to get an idea. When I have solved that problem, another big one comes - how to tell the story. I have to decide the type of narration, the setting, where to begin and how to end. Once I have planned all that, I don’t find the writing of the story so difficult. The words come fairly easily, unless the plan simply doesn’t work. Then that’s a very big problem!*

**END OF SUGGESTED ANSWERS**