

## True Stories

True Stories is a series of textbooks featuring engaging human-interest stories and follow-up activities. Accompanying illustrations build interest and help ease students into the reading. Vocabulary, comprehension, discussion and writing activities build skills in those areas and aid students in relating the stories to their own lives.

PLS Tokyo uses and recommends the following books, in order of difficulty:

- Very Easy True Stories
- Easy True Stories
- True Stories in the News
- More True Stories
- Even More True Stories
- Beyond True Stories

We assign the books to students who have completed at least Oxford Reading Tree, Stage 2, or are in junior high school and above. The more difficult texts are suitable for senior high school students, adults and returnees.

### *Procedure*

Each unit in the text is previewed before being assigned (week 0). It is then generally assigned over two consecutive weeks, with additional weeks assigned as needed. The homework check for each week differs in procedure. Each unit is taught as follows:

#### *Preview of the Story (Week 0)*

1. Before opening the book, build interest in the theme by asking questions, or telling a short anecdote related to the content. Also, encourage higher-level students to share their own anecdotes, asking them questions like, “Have you ever been to...?” and so forth.
2. Students open their books and read the unit title. Question them to confirm comprehension.
3. Call attention to the accompanying picture(s), again soliciting/supplying info and expanding.

(You may opt to reverse the above, focusing first on the picture(s), secondly, the title.)

4. You then begin to read the story.

- When you're reading, there's a strict "hand-raising rule". Students are clearly told that when anyone doesn't understand a word or phrase they must immediately raise their hand for an explanation. It works like this:

T: "...the dish soap was a free sample from the soap company—"

*Sachiko raises her hand.*

T: Yes, Sachiko?

S: What does "sample" mean?

You see that none of the other students are raising their hands. By not raising hands, they are implicitly claiming to understand everything they've heard. But you're suspicious of this. You call on Yuki.

T: Yuki. Please translate it.

Y: Huh? Who, me? Umm...

T: You don't know what "sample" means? Why weren't you raising your hand, then?

Y: Oh, I'm sorry. (*raises his hand*)

T: All right. Megumi?

M: It's *shikyōhin*.

S & Y: Thank you.

- The explanation given is usually a translation. In this exercise, those who raise their hands receive approval, as do those who can answer when called upon. But any who fail to raise their hands even though they don't understand something are to be taken to task for it.
- This hand-raising rule must be strictly enforced from the start, so students learn that it's better to ask for help than be caught with their hands down when they don't understand.
- If no one raises a hand, we spot-check words or expressions, as students sometimes think they understand, when the meaning may be slightly or entirely different.
- They are required to write new words and phrases in the vocabulary section of their notebooks with any needed translations, and we reread the sentence containing the unknown word before continuing with the story.

5. You continue reading aloud until reaching a suitable point in the second

half, usually a ‘cliffhanger.’ Students then close their books and, when appropriate (as it usually will be), we ask them to speculate on what will happen next, or how the story is likely to conclude.

6. For homework, students write the unit number of the story and the number of times to read it on their Super Homework Sheets. Listening is also assigned for books that come with audio. The audio for Easy True Stories is downloadable, while True Stories in the News and More True Stories come with a CD. As always, reading and listening assignments are tailored to individual students in accordance with strengths or weaknesses shown. One example homework assignment: (1) Read along with the CD three times. (2) Read twice without the CD.
7. Students also complete the assigned writing activities for homework (with the possible exception of the Discussion and (maybe) the Writing sections) in their neatest penmanship. Express distaste for the text examples (because they are unacceptably written above the line). The writing can be done in the first week, or spread out over two weeks, e.g., left page first week, right page, second.

#### *Homework Check – Week 1 (Basic Check)*

The students read their written answers in turn, and the others agree or disagree as they follow in their own books, correcting any errors with a colored pencil. Your role is to help with pronunciation and intonation, requiring best efforts.

Then students close their books and you ask basic questions: the story title, names, ages, places, etc. Individual students are called upon to answer in full sentences. They get a yellow chip if they need a hint to remember the answer. They get a red chip if they cannot answer even with a hint.

Each student will answer about four questions each week. Anyone who gets two red chips or four yellows, or a similar combination, is out of the check. Those who survive till the end get the teacher’s signature or stamp affixed to the upper left story page corner, assuming the writing homework was satisfactorily completed. It’s not necessary to give blue chips to reward correct answers.

For homework, they reread the story the assigned number of times (with one additional listening time for each yellow chip and two for a red) and com-

plete any unfinished writing sections.

### *Homework Check – Week 2 (Advanced Check)*

First, any remaining writing sections are checked. Then we, or students who passed the test the previous week, ask “softball” questions of those who need to get their first stamp.

Hopefully, all students are now ready for a harder test, with books closed: a mixture of translation in both directions, questions on any content it would be reasonable to expect retention of, and finishing of sentences.

The test content is more difficult, but the procedure is the same as ‘Week 1’. Those who pass get a second stamp on the right-hand side of their story page. Students who fail will study the story again, to prepare to be tested by their peers (with teacher’s assistance as needed) the following week.

We then introduce the next story as described in the homework assignment section. This means that those who fail the test in the second week will have to study two stories, so it’s important to encourage them to study hard and catch up with their classmates.

### *Additional Weeks*

Students who have passed a story ask questions of those who haven’t. The teacher may suggest appropriate questions for them to ask. At the start, or when the questioners are too slow, we intersperse questions of our own. Gradually, we train the students to run the activity by themselves, including giving yellow and red chips, stamping books, and assigning reading times, leaving us time to mark homework, or just to relax and enjoy the spectacle of a smoothly-running student-centered class.

### *Notes*

The stories in higher-level books become increasingly complex. It can be too difficult to remember exact details, so questions should relate more to the themes of the story: asking how and why people in the story did the things they did, rather than asking students to recall the color of a character’s hat, etc.

The units in the higher-level books also have extended activity sections and additional readings, so the basic two-week plan outlined above may be extended to three or possibly even four weeks.

The Discussion/Writing sections are often written in a way that assumes

the reader is now living in an English-speaking country. If this is the case, those sections can be modified or omitted as you deem appropriate.

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If you have questions about using True Stories, or would like to share your ideas for using the books—or if you've got *any* questions, concerns, suggestions, ideas, complaints or things to share about any of the materials or activities in our ever-expanding, constantly changing, sometimes frustrating but always beneficially challenging program—please don't hesitate to contact us! You can talk with us at seminars, or contact us by email, phone, or fax.

Good luck and happy teaching!