

Applying American Thanksgiving Culture in Senior Secondary English Reading-into-Writing Instruction

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Abstract: Anchored in the core competency orientation of the General Senior High School English Curriculum Standards (2017, revised 2020), this paper argues that cultural integration is central to effective reading-into-writing instruction at the senior secondary level. It first diagnoses persistent classroom challenges—disjunction between reading and writing, weak learner foundations coupled with single-track pedagogy, and insufficient cultural infusion—before proposing American Thanksgiving culture as a productive context because of its salient values of gratitude, reunion and service. Building on this premise, the study delineates a practical pathway comprising four mutually reinforcing components: embedding cultural background to create authentic reading contexts; mining the gratitude theme to guide continuation planning; enriching language input to ensure culturally appropriate and idiomatic expression; and emphasising process guidance with diversified assessment aligned to thematic conception, plot coherence, cultural integration, language control and stylistic effect. The approach aims to synchronise language ability and cultural awareness, enhance learners’ engagement, and support coherent, audience-aware narrative continuations. A concise research agenda is outlined to strengthen causal inference, refine assessment instruments, test cultural scope and sequencing, and ensure equitable, scalable implementation. The paper contributes a culturally grounded instructional framework and concrete classroom procedures that can inform English writing pedagogy in senior secondary schools, while signposting future empirical work on durability, transfer and differential impact across learner groups.

Keywords: American Thanksgiving culture; reading-into-writing; senior secondary English writing instruction; cultural awareness; intercultural communicative competence

1. Introduction

The *General Senior High School English Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition, Revised in 2020)* emphasise that English courses should cultivate students’ language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability. Cultural awareness includes “acquiring cultural knowledge, understanding cultural connotations, comparing cultural similarities and differences, drawing on cultural quintessence, forming correct values, strengthening cultural confidence, and possessing the ability to engage in intercultural communication and to disseminate Chinese culture”. In English learning, understanding the culture embedded in language is indispensable; cultivating cultural awareness can effectively enhance students’ interest in learning English (Li, 2024). Research shows that integrating intercultural content into English teaching not only helps learners understand and remember linguistic knowledge more intuitively and increases learning interest, but also optimises their language use ability (Chen & Pan, 2023). As a combined reading and writing task, reading-into-writing (continuation writing) requires learners to create a continuation on the basis of reading comprehension, which is conducive to developing

comprehensive language use and thinking quality. Yet the effectiveness of reading-into-writing instruction at senior secondary level remains sub-optimal, with multiple issues to be addressed. To this end, this paper proposes embedding American Thanksgiving culture into reading-into-writing instruction, with a view to offering new ideas and pathways for senior secondary English writing pedagogy.

2. The Cultural Connotations of American Thanksgiving

American Thanksgiving originated in harvest celebrations in the early 17th-century colonial period and is now a national holiday observed on the fourth Thursday of November each year. On Thanksgiving Day, Americans commonly reunite with family and friends, share a plentiful dinner and express gratitude (The White House, 2020). Thanksgiving reflects American society's emphasis on faith, family and friendship, embodying core values such as gratitude, freedom and democracy (National Archives, 2021). Traditional practices include prayers of thanks, family meals and charitable giving. For example, people often participate in charity activities and thank others for their help during the holiday, demonstrating the philanthropy and community spirit inherent in Thanksgiving. These cultural connotations provide rich resources for reading-into-writing instruction: by learning about the history and customs of Thanksgiving, students can deepen their understanding of values in English-speaking countries. Incorporating Thanksgiving elements into continuation writing not only brings the storyline closer to real life but also guides students to appreciate the importance of gratitude and sharing, thereby integrating language learning with affective education. The ideas of being grateful to others, cherishing reunion and mutual support inherent in Thanksgiving culture positively contribute to cultivating students' sound values and intercultural understanding. Therefore, fully tapping the educational value of Thanksgiving culture and integrating it as material into senior secondary English reading-into-writing can broaden students' cultural horizons and provide authentic, vivid situational support for continuation writing.

3. Practical Challenges in Current Senior Secondary Reading-into-Writing Instruction

A number of problems and difficulties persist in current practice and merit attention and improvement.

3.1 Disjunction between reading and writing, with no integration mechanism

Some teachers over-emphasise test routines, directly transplanting university entrance examination item types into teaching. Task design is homogeneous and lacks overall planning, so learners' writing after reading is poorly supported. Reading lessons and writing lessons operate in silos; bridges for subsequent writing are not laid during reading instruction. Writing practice becomes a formality, feedback is single and delayed, and issues such as vacuous content, missing key points, limited linguistic techniques and inappropriate pragmatics are salient. As a result, integrated reading-writing competence is hard to improve effectively (Luo & Huang, 2023).

3.2 Weak learner foundations and single-track teaching methods

Studies indicate that students' English writing often features Chinese-style thinking, grammatical errors and spelling mistakes (Xue, 2011). Many perceive writing tasks as dull and difficult, lacking interest and motivation. Manifestations include limited vocabulary, monotonous sentence patterns and "Chinglish" expressions. Meanwhile, teaching methods are constrained. Many teachers rely on traditional approaches, frequently providing model texts and asking students to imitate templates, while neglecting guidance on learners' own writing experiences and imagination. Continuation practice is often assigned as homework, with little in-class guidance and practice. This leads to perfunctory completion, inadequate pre-writing input and during-writing practice, and limited development of writing skills (Mo, 2019).

3.3 Insufficient cultural integration and weak intercultural awareness

Researchers point out that foreign language teaching often stresses linguistic knowledge at the expense of introducing Chinese and Western cultural backgrounds and values, with inadequate cultivation of students' cultural understanding (Wang & Jiang, 2020). Influenced by traditional views, many teachers consider intercultural education too complex for senior secondary contexts and thus focus on linguistic form training, investing insufficiently in nurturing intercultural communicative awareness and ability. Consequently, learners may master

grammar and lexis yet lack the capacity to use language effectively in authentic contexts (Xue, 2007). In reading-into-writing tasks, story settings are often grounded in Anglophone cultures; without requisite background knowledge and intercultural thinking, students struggle to produce coherent, context-appropriate continuations. These challenges suggest that both instructional philosophy and strategy need recalibration to better integrate reading and writing and to strengthen students' interest in writing and cultural awareness.

4. Practical Pathways for Integrating Thanksgiving Culture into Reading-into-Writing

To address the issues above, this paper proposes embedding American Thanksgiving culture into senior secondary reading-into-writing as a carrier within integrated reading-writing pedagogy, enriching continuation content and context and enhancing instructional effectiveness. On the basis of the curricular goals of language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability, practice can proceed as follows.

4.1 Embed cultural background to create authentic reading contexts

Teachers may select level-appropriate texts that directly reference Thanksgiving practices or values so that cultural knowledge is not treated as decorative but as meaning-bearing context for comprehension. Prior to reading, a concise cultural primer introduces the historical origins of the festival, its contemporary observance across diverse communities and its core values of gratitude, reunion and service. Multimodal prompts such as captioned images, short transcripts of table toasts and brief notices for community food drives can be used to prime genre expectations and situational frames. During reading, guided cultural noticing tasks draw attention to value statements, behavioural norms and symbolic objects that influence character motivation and plot development. Students annotate where gratitude is shown through action, where reconciliation is attempted and where communal belonging is affirmed, thereby linking cultural detail to narrative causality. After reading, the class consolidates new knowledge through short reflective summaries that restate the text's cultural cues in their own words and relate them to the prospective continuation task. The sequence ensures that cultural input activates prior knowledge, raises interest and furnishes an authentic situational scaffold for the writing that follows. In this way, Thanksgiving is not reduced to food or spectacle but functions as a coherent frame that shapes setting, character choices and the moral direction of the story.

4.2 Mine the theme of gratitude and guide continuation planning

Thanksgiving culture centres on gratitude, family bonds and mutual care and therefore provides a clear emotional thread for continuation writing. Following comprehension, teachers guide students to reconstruct the source text's chain of cause, feeling and action so that any new development arises naturally from established motives. Learners identify the moment at which the protagonist recognises a debt of kindness, articulate the emotion that follows and plan a culturally plausible response such as a public thanks at the table, an act of service for the community or a gesture of reconciliation with a family member. Planning is strengthened through a two-track outline in which one track records the concrete story beats of time, place and conflict resolution and the other records the realisation of values through choices and consequences. Perspective shifts are encouraged to widen the range of options while maintaining thematic coherence, for example by retelling a key scene from the viewpoint of a parent, neighbour or volunteer coordinator. Teachers model the opening of a continuation paragraph that links tightly to the last sentence of the source text, demonstrating controlled progression, clear causality and an avoidance of contrived turns. Students then draft brief scene sketches that test the feasibility of their plans, after which whole-class discussion examines whether the theme of gratitude is shown rather than merely asserted and whether the envisioned actions align with the cultural frame introduced earlier. Through this iterative planning, the continuation retains logical cohesion with the source while achieving affective uplift.

4.3 Enrich language input and foreground culturally appropriate expression

Targeted pre-writing input equips learners to depict Thanksgiving credibly and idiomatically and reduces lexical poverty during drafting. Teachers co-construct a bank of reusable expressions that cover gratitude formulae, ceremonial language for table toasts, precise lexis for family gatherings and community service, and cohesive

devices that support narrative flow. Short mentor passages such as a compact thanksgiving speech or a dialogue at a volunteer sign-up desk are examined for register, stance and softening strategies so that students internalise how appreciation is expressed with sincerity and tact. Contrastive noticing helps learners avoid literal translation from Chinese and replace vague verbs with concrete actions that show feeling through behaviour. Ten-minute micro-practice transforms a single sentence of thanks into a short scene with sensory detail and controlled pacing, reinforcing the link between lexical choice and emotional effect. Prior to full drafting, students highlight in their plans where specific expressions and cohesion markers will be deployed so that language input is visibly connected to rhetorical purpose. During drafting, teachers provide brief nudges that steer register and idiomaticity without overwhelming fluency. The result is a continuation that sounds natural in English, reflects the cultural expectations of the setting and advances the story through precise, culturally aware depiction.

4.4 Emphasise process guidance and strengthen diversified assessment

High-quality continuations emerge when process guidance and evaluation are aligned with cultural and narrative aims. Instruction proceeds through clear stages of planning, scene sketching, full drafting and revision so that feedback arrives while ideas are still malleable. Early checkpoints verify continuity with the source text and plausibility within a Thanksgiving setting, while mid-draft conferencing addresses the clarity of the gratitude theme, the accuracy and naturalness of cultural elements and the coherence of plot resolution. Peer review is organised with a concise checklist that focuses on theme visibility, cultural fit, narrative causality and appropriateness of register. After drafting, students submit a short revision note that explains one cultural adjustment and one narrative improvement, thereby making their decision-making explicit and reflective. Assessment is conducted with an analytic rubric that balances meaning and form through five dimensions, namely thematic conception, plot coherence, cultural integration, language control and stylistic effect, each described in concrete terms to guide self-assessment and teacher feedback. Exemplars are briefly discussed to illustrate effective integration of cultural detail without cliché and to demonstrate how modest linguistic choices can yield strong affective impact. Throughout, the principle remains that cultural material should be woven naturally from the theme and plot logic rather than inserted mechanically. When handled with this degree of care, cultural integration strengthens language output, deepens cognitive engagement and measurably improves the quality and authenticity of students' continuation writing.

5. Recommendations for Further Research

5.1 Research design and longitudinal impact

Future studies should employ designs capable of supporting stronger causal claims and tracing development over time. Beyond small-scale teaching demonstrations, quasi-experiments and, where feasible, randomised controlled trials comparing culturally integrated reading-into-writing with business-as-usual instruction would help estimate effects on writing quality, cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence. Longitudinal tracking across a term or academic year is needed to examine durability of gains in language control, genre awareness and value internalisation, and to test transfer to tasks not explicitly tied to festive themes.

Fidelity-of-implementation data should be collected alongside outcomes to document dosage, adherence and teacher adaptations in authentic classrooms, thereby clarifying which components are necessary and sufficient for impact.

5.2 Assessment and instrument refinement

Reliable evaluation requires tools with demonstrated validity in senior secondary EFL contexts. Future work should develop and validate analytic rubrics aligned with this study's emphasis on thematic conception, plot coherence, cultural integration, language control and stylistic effect, ensuring acceptable inter-rater reliability across tasks and school settings. Parallel measures of cultural awareness and intercultural disposition should be adapted or constructed with clear construct validity and sensitivity to curricular aims. Mixed-methods designs that triangulate rubric scores with think-aloud protocols, learner journals and classroom observations can illuminate

how students mobilise cultural schemata during planning and how affective understandings of gratitude are converted into concrete narrative choices, strengthening explanatory power beyond surface scores.

5.3 Cultural scope, sequencing and transferability

While Thanksgiving provides clear values and rich narrative affordances, comparative research should test the generality of findings across cultural themes and sequencing choices. Cross-theme studies could contrast Thanksgiving with other Anglophone topics such as community volunteering traditions or historical biography, and with Chinese cultural narratives that foreground reciprocity and filial piety, to determine whether improvements stem from the specificity of the festival or from the broader mechanism of value-centred contextualisation. Sequencing effects merit attention: starting with culturally familiar Chinese narratives before moving to Thanksgiving may reduce cognitive load and scaffold comprehension, whereas immediate engagement with unfamiliar material may heighten curiosity and uptake. Transfer should be probed through delayed post-tests and by examining performance on independent writing genres, thereby assessing whether cultural integration supports broader gains in narrative thinking and audience-aware expression.

5.4 Implementation, equity and scalability

Impact depends on how pedagogy is enacted across diverse learners and settings. Research should analyse moderation by proficiency band, prior writing attainment, socio-economic background and urban–rural context, ensuring that culturally integrated instruction benefits lower-proficiency students as well as high-attaining peers. Teacher professional learning that integrates cultural literacies, genre pedagogy and process-oriented assessment deserves systematic trial to identify effective models and to track shifts in teacher beliefs and practices. The role of technology and multimodal input should be specified in terms of measurable contributions to vocabulary uptake, scene construction and register control, with careful attention to data privacy and ethical use. Finally, policy-relevant studies should estimate time and resource requirements for large-scale adoption, map alignment with curriculum standards on language ability, cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability, and provide open-access repositories of validated texts, prompts, rubrics and anonymised exemplars to support replication and adaptation. Such work will clarify for whom culturally integrated reading-into-writing is most effective, under what conditions, and with which core components essential for sustained improvement.

6. Conclusion

In sum, American Thanksgiving culture, as a distinctive Anglophone cultural resource with rich educational value, can be organically integrated into senior secondary reading-into-writing to improve writing outcomes and cultivate cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence. By creating authentic Thanksgiving scenarios, guiding the mining of the gratitude theme, enriching linguistic and cultural input, and strengthening process guidance and assessment, students can both enhance reading-writing ability and deepen their understanding and identification with English-speaking cultures. Such integration accords with the core competency orientation of the English curriculum and contributes to developing learners' comprehensive English application and humanistic literacy. In practice, teachers should choose suitable cultural entry points and strategies according to different texts and learner profiles. Future work can extend integrated reading-writing practice to other cultural themes (e.g., traditional festivals, historical figures) and continue to explore effective pathways for embedding culture in language teaching. Through ongoing practice and reflection, we have reason to believe that integrating Thanksgiving culture into reading-into-writing can realise the dual goals of educating through culture and through texts, improving students' writing while cultivating intercultural awareness and laying a solid foundation for holistic development.

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