

Introduction

Generally speaking, when students major in Applied English, it implies that they are interested in English or at least recognize that English is an important language for their future education and careers. In reality, however, the learning motivation and English competence of many Applied English majors overwhelm English teachers in vocational institutes, especially in the area of writing. You and Joe (2003) note that according to Chen's survey in 2001, 89.7% of English teachers prefer to teach English courses more than EFL composition.

Writing an English essay is never an easy task for many vocational college English majors. When asked to write on a given topic for an essay, they usually ask how many paragraphs and words the essay should have. In classroom practices, it is found that grammatical errors and problematic sentence structures commonly appear in students' writings. This is also the case for participants' writing in this study and some of the participants failed to even compose simple sentences correctly. As a teacher, I recognize that there is a need to find a writing model which is both interesting and easy for students to copy so as to foster their sentence structure compilation. Chen (2001) and Phillips (1986) both suggest that writing models provide a powerful impact on words and structural patterns used in essay writing. Thus, I began to consider that the characteristics of picture books, which contain interesting stories and simple sentence patterns, could play an important role in teaching English writing.

This present study explored what percentage of students who participated in the study has improved in sentence maturity when they were asked to read and write stories over a period of time. In order to investigate the effectiveness of the student-authored book in helping students to write English well and enhance their sense of story, the following research questions were addressed:

1. Does the task of student-authored book enhance Applied Foreign Language majors' sense of story?

2. Does the task of student-authored book enhance Applied Foreign Language majors' sentence maturity?
3. What is the Applied Foreign Language majors' attitude toward the task of student-authored book?

Literature Review

The Definition of Sense of Story

Sense of story indicates the basic elements of a story. It is also referred to as "Story Grammar". Brown (1977) associates sense of story with correct sequencing, characterizations and dialogue between characters (cited from Phillips, 1986), while Applebee (1978) aligns sense of story with title, formal closing and consistent past tense. Also, Fitzgerald and Teasley (1983) note that sense of story grammar can be broken into Mandler and Johnson's six major categories of narrative information: setting, beginning, reaction, attempt, outcome and ending. Phillips (1986) writes that sense of story includes title, formal closing and consistent past tense, correct sequencing, characters, dialogue and the ability to use the language of a story. In conclusion, this study adopted the following eight elements which should be included in a sense of story -- title, setting, time, background or beginning, problem encountered, attempt or solution, and ending.

The Importance of Sense of Story in ESL Learning

Merritt and Liles (1987), claim that storytelling is a useful approach to access students' sense of story. That is, students' knowledge of story structure is revealed by the complexity of their narrative productions (Fitzgerald & Spiegel, 1983; Stein, 1986). Thus, from students' stories, teachers can examine elements of story grammar and gain an understanding about students' sense of story. Based on several reasons, sense of story is important for ESL learning. First, storybooks have been widely used in language arts or other content area classes for both first

and second language students because of their attractive pictures and simplified sentence patterns, which are easier for students to comprehend. Helping ESL students to have a better sense of story can assist them to better understand story-based materials (Page & Stewart, 1985). Second, research indicates that students who have better knowledge of story structure tend to be better readers because their knowledge helps them understand and remember stories easily (Page & Stewart, 1985; Taylor, 1992). Thus, "It is possible, then, that one way to advance students' reading comprehension is to enhance the development of their knowledge of story grammar" (Whaley, 1981, p. 762).

In addition, students' sense of story affects their listening comprehension and the ability to tell or retell stories because the story grammar helps readers or listeners organize incoming story information (Coleman-Mitzer, 1980, 1981; Mata-Pistokache, 1996; Page & Stewart, 1985). Students who have a good sense of story can easily understand the main points when listening to or retelling a story. These skills are needed for ESL learners because of the importance of listening in the ESL classroom while storytelling is a common activity in the lower primary grades. Moreover, a well-developed sense of story can contribute to improve reading and writing skills due to the fact that story grammar lays out the rules that ESL learners could follow in developing their own stories. Awareness of these structures makes both comprehension of reading and writing a story easier because a better understanding of story plots may assist learners to comprehend the complex interwoven plot variations frequently found in narratives (Hogan, 1990; Ice, 1989; Lehr, 1987; Raines & Isbell, 1988). In other words, a sense of story is important in ESL learning because this knowledge helps ESL learners comprehend more complex stories when reading or listening. Also, it facilitates the telling, retelling or writing of stories.

Studies in Using Picture Books

Children's literature serves not only a purpose of entertaining, it also builds a bridge between parents and children as well as teachers and pupils. Most important, in recent decades the use of children's literature as a helpful tool to foster second language skills has increased greatly. Compared to using textbooks only, the use of children's literature is suggested in the ESL/EFL classroom for the reason that it provides a natural way to involve students in language learning. Also, it plays a valuable role in a foreign language classroom in that it is dedicated to make reading and writing meaningful, exciting, and relevant to students' lives. In addition, picture books offer the advantage of illustrations to explain much of the vocabulary, aiding visual learning. Moreover, repeated patterns in picture books provide additional aid for language learning, especially sentence patterns, correct tense and richer vocabulary (Smallwood, 1992). A number of existing studies on using children's literature to aid students in mastering writing skills will be addressed below.

In Nayce and Christies's study (1980), focus on using children's literature to develop children's grasp of syntax. The findings show that using children's literature helps children learn more complex sentence structures through a sentence modeling cycle. Thus, the researcher suggested that children's literature plays an important role in improving syntactic competence by providing an effective vehicle for the integration of language arts experience.

In Cooper's study (1982), children's books were used in a variety of ways to provide a stimulus for writing, especially for those students with limited language ability and low motivation for writing. In this study, children's books played a role in cultivating student motivation and interest to write.

In response to earlier research which found that too many children in the United States leave elementary school without developing the ability to use words imaginatively, Stweig (1985) conducted a study on a teaching approach which uses children's literature to foster inventiveness in children's writing. The results

showed that children's literature provided models both rich in vocabulary and syntax. In other words, students engaged in a literary environment could learn correct sentence patterns and rich vocabulary from the storybooks they had read.

In Salminen's Study (1998), the researcher employed both picture books and wordless picture books to help non-native English speaker students with limited English ability develop writing skills. The result indicated that children's literature helped these ESL students with low language proficiency level improve their overall writing skills.

In a 1998-study by Sili, literature-based instruction was implemented to explore Indonesian fourth grade students' language skills. In this study, she employed reading aloud, sustained silent reading, book discussion and journal writing in response to children's book reading. The results showed that during the five-month period of the study, these ESL students' attitudes toward writing changed from negative to positive. Also, these ESL students spent more time practicing reading and writing, showing that students' learning engagement increased as well.

In 2006, Wang's study implemented picture books to help college students' writing ability and sense of story. In this study, she used reading aloud, shared reading and story writing tasks as classroom presentations. The results showed that picture books enhanced both high-proficiency and low-proficiency college students' writing competence and sense of story.

Wang (2007, 2009 and 2010) used children's literature to motivate college English majors to read more and increase their writing ability. The findings revealed that the implementing of children's literature motivated more than 70 percent of the participants to spend extra time reading English. Participants also thought that the reading and writing story tasks helped them in both their writing proficiency and creativity.

Methods

Participants

The participants of this study included 54 students who enrolled at the Department of Applied Foreign Languages during 98 semester of academic year 2009-2010. At the time of conducting the study, they were 4th year students in the five-year-college system. Prior to the study they had already had two years of grammar classes and one year of formal English composition training.

Instrumentations

The following books (see Table 1) were selected for reading aloud while grammar and story elements were discussed from September, 2009 to May, 2010. For Example, a sentence from *Doctor De Soto*, “**One day**, when they **looked out**, they **saw** a well-dressed fox with a flannel bandage around his jaw” is used to provide students with a model for the correct usage of verbs in the past tense.

Table 1
Picture Books Used for Reading Aloud

Title	Date	Note
The Giving Tree (by Shel Silver Stein) One Fine Day (by Nonny Hogrogian) Hansel and Gretel (by Rika Lesser)	9/16/ 2009	1. Introduction to title, character, time and setting. 2. The use of past tense in a story. 3. Subject-verb agreement
Coco Can't Wait (by Taro Gomi) It's Mine (by Leo Lionni)	9/23	Review background, problem encountered, solution and ending
Tomorrow (in days with Frog and Toad/ by Arnold Lobel) Kite (in days with Frog and Toad/ by Arnold Lobel) The Little Riding Hood (by Jess Stockham)	9/30	Review characters, verb tense and ending
Peppé: The Lamplighter (by Ellisa Bartone)	10/7	Review background Ending and theme

Student-Authored Book: Enhancing College Students' Sense of Story and Writing Competition

Click, Clack, Moo Cow That Type (by Doreen Cronin) The Little House (Virginia Lee Burton)	10/14	Review verb tenses, problem encountered, solution ending
When I Was Young in the Mountain (by Dynthia Rylant) The Doorbell Rang (by pat Hutchins)	10/21	Review verb tenses
Strega Nona (by Tomie de Paola)	11/11	Review all the basic elements-title, character, time, setting, background, problem encountered, solution and ending
The Wind and the Sun (by Emily Hales & Ramm Andresen) Who Took The Farmer's Hat (by Joan L. Nodest)	11/18	Review problem encountered, solution and ending
The Carrot Seed (by Ruth Krauss) The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig (by Eugene Trivizas)	12/2	Review Problem Encountered, Solution, Ending
A Pocket for Corduroy (by Don Treeman)	12/16	Review basic elements of a story—title, character, time, setting, problem encountered, solution, and ending
The Ugly Duckling (by Masumi Furukawa)	12/23	Review title, character, time, place
Prayer for a Child (by Rachel Field) Alrene Sardine (by Chris Raschka)	3/8/ 2010	Review title characters and theme
Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves (Disney's)	3/15	Review solution and ending
Big Anthony (by Tomie de Paola)	3/22	Review problem encountered, solution and ending
The Mystery of the Missing Peanuts (Disney's)	3/29	Practice—listen to the story and write down all the basic

		elements
The Princess Who Never Laughed (Disney's)	4/19	Practice-Listen to the story and write down all the basic elements
Bumbebee, Bymnbebee, Do You Know Me (by Anne Rockwell) Owl Moon (by Jane Yalen) My Uncle Harry (by Bruce Ramm Andersen)	5/3	Review Sentence Structures Verb Tenses
The Little Red Hen (by Jess stockham) Harry: The Dirty Dog (by Gene Zion)	5/10	Subject-verb agreement Verb Tenses
Swimmy (by Leo Lionni) Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears (by Verna Aardema) Doctor De Soto (William Steig) The Stray Dog (by Marc Simont)	5/24	Review Basic Elements of a Story—title, character, time, setting, problem encountered, solution and ending

Data Collection

The data were collected from the output of the participants, with their pre-story writing on September 18, 2009 and post-story writing on June 25, 2010. Each time, they had one class period (50 minutes) to write a story. For the pre-story and post-story writing tasks, the participants needed to create a new story. They did not need to make a storybook during the pre-story and post-story writing tasks. The story productions of each participant were counted based on T-unit and basic elements of a story. Moreover, on the last day of this study, each subject was asked to fill out a questionnaire regarding their attitude toward the use of picture books in enhancing their understanding toward a story structure and developing their writing proficiency as well as toward the task of creating a picture book.

Classroom Practices

Reading Aloud. The subjects and the researcher met once a week for about 100 minutes, two class periods worth of time. On average, the teacher read two to

three storybooks aloud. The following strategies were used by the researcher; pre-reading, reading aloud and discussion after reading.

Shared Reading. The subjects were given some take-home reading assignments. After reading, they had to introduce which parts of the story or which characters in the story they liked best and then share their reflections on the story.

The stories listed below (Table 2) were selected from *Discovering Fiction 1*, by Rosemary Gelshenen for shared reading. The participants were given time to read the stories at home and they were asked to share their reflections in the classroom.

Table 2
Stories Used for Shared Reading

Title	Author	Published Year	Date
The Blanket	Floyed Dell	2001	10/28/2009
The Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen	William Sydney Porter	2001	11/25/2009
A Secret for Two	Quentin Reynolds	2001	12/16/2009
Eleven	Sandra Cisneros	2001	03/22/2010
Bracelet	Yoshiko Uchida	2001	04/05/2010

Creating a Storybook: Following the post-writing stage, the researcher counted all the basic elements and words per T-unit in the participants' pre-story writing and post-story writing productions. Then the participants were assigned partners -- 4-6 students per group were suggested -- to make a storybook. They could use one of the participants' stories which had been written during the pre-story or post-story writing tasks, or they could work together to create a new story and then create a book. Also, they could make their storybooks by using PowerPoint or they could opt for making a hard cover storybook. The "create a storybook" exercise was solely aimed at allowing students to display their work after reading and writing stories for nearly one academic year, and was not counted as data used for this study.

Data Analysis

These stories generated by the participants were analyzed and compared based on the following factors: sense of a story or basic elements of a story and words per T-unit (WTU).

Different researchers have different views about sense of story or basic elements of a story, and some have even suggested that dialogue and theme usage should be included in a story. This study adopted the viewpoint that sense of story should at least include title, character, setting, time, beginning or background, problem encountered, attempt, and ending. A checklist with the above-mentioned eight elements was used to record the participants' sense of story in their story writing productions. In other words, the criteria for deciding the subjects' sense of story were based on the following elements:

1. Title (T): Does the story have a title? Does the title suit the story?
2. Characters (C): Does the story have a main character?
3. Setting (S): Is the setting described?
4. Time (t): Is the time described, or does the story at least indicate "One Day?"
5. Beginning (B): Does it give a background of an event or a main character?
6. Problem Encountered (P): Is a specific difficulty or problem described?
7. Attempt (A): Is the character's effort towards the problem encountered stated?
8. Ending (E): Is a formal closing used for the story?

T-Units: T-Units were adopted for this study instead of using sentences based on a reason detected by the researcher, that is, frequently, the participants over used "and" in their writing.

Hunt (1965, 1970) defines T-units as a minimal terminable unit with one main clause plus subordinate clauses attached to or embedded within it. In addition, Hunt claims that using T-units provides an apparently more reliable measure of language maturity compared to using sentences. Hedberg and Westby (1993) also

advocate that the “T-unit division of a text is easier and more reliable than division into sentences.” (p.39) Applebee (1978) writes that a “T-unit is directly related to linguistic complexity; the longer the T-units, the more complex the language is likely to be in transformational terms.” (p. 182) T-unit length or words per T-unit (WTU) was computed in the following way:

$$\text{T-Unit Length} = \frac{\text{Total Words (TW)}}{\text{Total T-units (TTU)}} = \text{Average Words Per T-unit (WTU)}$$

T-Test: A statistical tool, Paired-Sample T-test was used to compare the means between pre-writing and post-writing of subjects, in order to find any differences in their syntactic maturity after picture books were implemented.

Results and Discussion

Research question 1: Does the task of student-authored book enhance the Applied Foreign Language majors' sense of story?

Examining the sense of story of the participants (Shown in Table 3) through their first story productions revealed that all of them knew that a story should clearly describe its character and the problem encountered by the main character. However, 43 subjects (11 of the 54 participants) failed to write any titles for their own stories, which could possibly be attributed to the fact that they were accustomed to writing English compositions under a given topic and thus ignored the need to indicate a title. When it comes to the development of the stories, 25 students did not clearly describe how their main characters solved the problem encountered and their stories directly jumped to the ending; 23 of them did not have a clear ending.

In the post story-writing task, the participants achieved better performance as their stories contained most of the basic elements. Still, seven of the 54 participants forgot to think about a title for their own stories and 10 of them ended a story without any attempt towards their difficulties or a final solution.

Table 3
Frequency of Basic Elements in Participants' Stories

Basic Element of a Story	Pre-story Writing	Post-story Writing
Title	11	47
Character(s)	54	54
Time	34	54
Setting	35	52
Background	48	54
Problem Encountered	54	54
Attempt or solution toward the difficulty	29	44
Ending	31	54

Research question 2: Does the task of student-authored book enhance Applied Foreign Language majors' sentence maturity?

The findings (shown in Table 4) indicate that, between the pre-writing and post-writing stages, the mean in the second story productions is significantly higher than the first story productions (8.09 to 10.38). In other words, the students do show significant improvement in their sentence maturity.

Yet, after deeper analysis the outputs of the participants indicate that some of the participants still did not implement the correct usage of verbs. Some errors are still seen in students' story productions. For example, *The farmer was finished his job in his farm* and *One day, a little girl see a dog in a park*. In this regard participants probably need to read and practice their writing skills further.

Table 4
Comparison of WTU between Pre-writing and Post-writing

Story Writing Task	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	T	Sig.
Pre-story Writing	8.09	54	2.64050	.35933	-6.364	.000
Post-story Writing	10.38	54				

P < .005

Research question 3: What is the Applied Foreign Language majors' attitude toward the task of student-authored book?

The questionnaire was designed to determine the attitudes of the participants toward the student-authored book task in improving their sense of story and writing competence.

The results from the questionnaire (shown on Table 5) indicate that all of the college participants like English storybooks. Also, 96% of the students said that reading English storybooks aloud and listening to English storybooks helped them recognize the basic elements needed to compose a story. Moreover, 60% agreed that the story writing tasks helped their sentence structure and grammatical concepts, as well as correct usage of verb tenses and subject-verb agreement.

Totally 11 storybooks were generated by the participants in this study. Three of the most creative picture books are displayed (Shown in Appendix). However, when asked if they enjoyed making their own storybooks, the answers were less positive. Only 12 (22.22%) of participants said “yes” while 31 of them said writing stories was more difficult than writing an ordinary English composition with a given topic. Subjects reported enjoying writing English stories, but said they did not really enjoy turning these stories into books. Despite this, however, they did feel a sense of achievement seeing their names on the front covers of their storybooks. They further explained that they did not like making their own storybooks because they were never good at drawing pictures for their own stories; they also said that the student-authored book was a time consuming task.

Table 5
Applied Foreign Language Majors' Attitude toward Picture Books

Question	Students' Answer (N = 54)		
	Yes	No	No Opinion
1. Do you like English storybooks?	54 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

2. Do you think listening to stories and reading storybooks help you enhance your sense of a story (story grammar)?	52 (96%)	0 (0%)	2 (4%)
3. Do you think writing story tasks help you enhance your writing competence?	38 (70%)	0 (0%)	16 (30%)
4. What do you learn most from the story reading and writing? (This is an open question you need to provide your answers based on your own situation.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. 20 of the students said that they “start to be aware of the basic elements of a story.” b. 6 of the students wrote that they “learn simple sentence structure.” c. 25 of the students wrote that they “learn to use correct verb tense for their writing.” d. 13 of the students wrote that they learn “subject and verb agreement” from the story writing process. 		
5. Do you enjoy creating your own storybooks? (This is an open question you need to provide your answers based on your own situation.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. 12 of them said “yes”. They enjoyed creating their own storybook and saw their own names on the cover page. b. 31 of them said they enjoyed writing English stories but did not enjoy making the stories into a book. They said they could not draw pictures well and it took a lot of time to complete a storybook. 		

Conclusion

This study revealed that the student-authored book task enhanced the participants’ sentence maturity. During this study, each student had the opportunity to listen to their teacher reading stories aloud and story grammar and grammatical rules were also discussed. When examining their writing competence, it was found that T-unit (WTU), which is a measure of syntactic maturity, improved significantly in the post story writing productions. This implies that listening to stories and reading storybooks may help the participants in building their sentence structures. Thus, it is suggested that language teachers can use picture books as a

learning model for language learners to copy and understand sentence structures.

When examining the participants' sense of a story, initially, 43 of the 54 students did not even know the necessity of a title in developing their stories and also lacked many of elements in their story productions. However, gradually, they were able to include these basic elements in their post story productions. This implies that listening and reading story books could help the participants become aware of certain elements that exist in a story. Thus, it is suggested that language teachers can employ picture books to help students comprehend story structures.

The findings from the questionnaire show that all of the students in this study liked storybooks. They agreed that the task of student-authored book helped them enhance their sense of story, verb tenses and sentence maturity. This implies that reading and writing tasks were accepted by the college students. Yet, many of them did not enjoy making their stories into picture books because they felt it was time consuming and they were not artistic enough. So, the findings suggests, that for language teachers, the task of student-authored book is an interesting way to motivate students to write. However, using storybook-making as a tool to improve students' English ability may be used only when students are ready and willing to be the authors of their own storybooks.

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Information of Picture Books Used in This Study

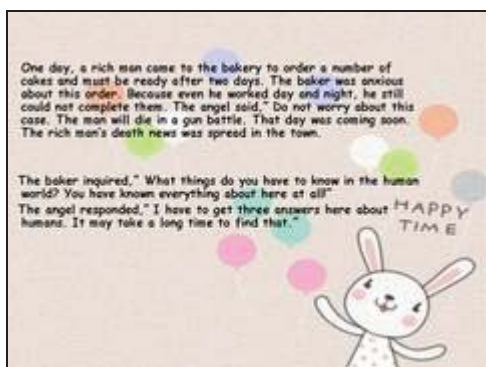
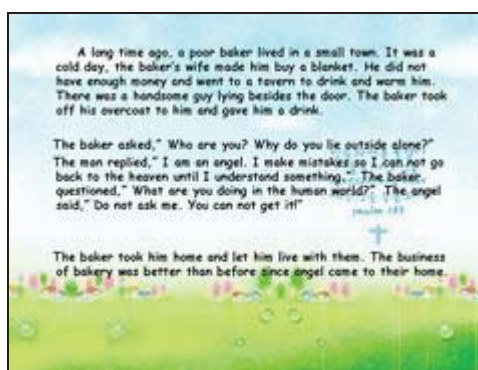
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Alrene Sardine (Chris Raschka, 1998, Orchard Books)
A Pocket for Corduroy (Don Freeman, 1978, Scholastic)

Big Anthony (Tomie dePaola, 1998, Puffin Books)
Bubebee, Bubebee, Do You Know Me? (Anne Rockwell, 1999, Scholastic)
Click, Clack, Moo Cows That Type (Doreen Cronin, 2000, Scholastic)
CoCo Can't Wait (Taro Gomi, Scholastic, 1997)
Doctor De Soto (William Steig, 1982, Scholastic)
Hansel and Gretel (Andrea Petrlik, 2005, Child's Play)
Harry: The Dirty Dog (Gene Zion, 1956, A Trumpet Club)
It's Mine (Leo Lionni, 1985, Scholastic)
My Uncle Harry (Bruce Ramm Andresen, 1999, Onyx Global)
One Fine day (Honny Hogrogian, 1971, Aladdin Paperbacks)
Owl Moon (Jane Yolen, 1987, Scholastic)
Peppe The Lamplighter (Elisa Barton, 1993, Mulberry)
Pray for a Child (Rachel Field, 1941, Aladdin Paperbacks)
Strega Nona (Tomie de Paola, 1975, Puffin Books)
Swimmy (Leo Lionni, 1963, Scholastic)
The Carrot Seed (Ruth Krauss, 1945, Scholastic)
The Doorbell Ring (Pat Hutchins, 1986, Scholastic)
The Giving Tree (Shel Silverstein, 1964, Harper Collins)
The Kite (in Days With Frog and Toad) (Arnold Lobel, 1979, Harper Trophy)
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Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears (Verna Aardema, 1975, Scholastic)

Appendix

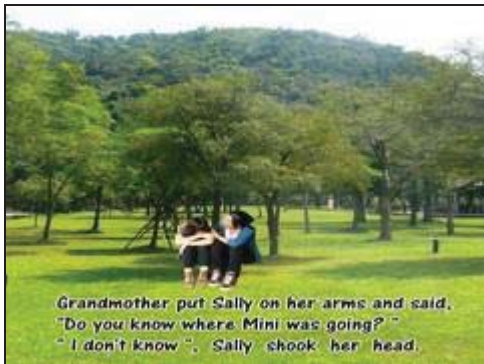
Samples of Students' Story Writing Productions

Title: The Fallen Angel



Title: Sally's Pet





Title: Sharing




Sharing



五語四一
5950 1003 陳平堯
5950 1021 房思儼

Sharing

Amy was born in a happy family. She had a younger sister. They loved each other. However, they always fought to each other for toys.



Sharing


One day, they fought as usual, before Amy went to kindergarten, they fought again. At that time, she said to her younger sister whose name was Mandy, "I never want to see you again, I hope you can disappear!"



Sharing

Amy was crying to kindergarten. The teacher asked Amy "what's wrong? Sweaty." "My sister always took away my toys; mommy and daddy didn't love me anymore! No one likes me..." Amy said.

WHY?



Sharing

"You should learn how to share everything with your sister because you are family. I also believe your mommy and daddy love you so much; I know they love you because all of the parents must love their kids."



Sharing

And Mandy is just a little kid who doesn't come to kindergarten; she doesn't know many things that you know. You are her elder sister; you have to teach her about everything, okay?"

Amy still couldn't understand.



Sharing

When Amy came back to home,
She wanted to play with Mandy.
However, she couldn't find Mandy.
She asked her mommy
"where is Mandy? Mommy."
"I thought you don't want to see her
anymore so your daddy took her away
To other place.
Now, you don't need to see her anymore."



Sharing

She was very sad and she cried loudly.
Suddenly, she heard the door was
opening, she ran to the door. She saw
Mandy was standing
out of the door. Amy was so happy and
ran to Mandy.
"I love you, my sister, I want to see you
Everyday and we would never fight
again, okay?" Amy said.
"Okay! I love you, too!" Mandy said.
"And I am so sorry.. I wouldn't never
say I hope you can disappear that kind
of sentence." Amy said to Mandy.
Then they gave each other a big hug!



Sharing

After that day,
they still loved each other
but they still fought to each other for
toys.
Which family never argues or fights?
The important thing is learn to share
And love our family.



END.