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**STUDENTS' ABILITY IN DESCRIBING THEMSELVES THROUGH SYMBOLS**

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**Abstract.** Among the various numbers of English learning skills, writing is considered important component in expressing written thoughts. This is proven by many students still difficult to start and afraid in making grammatical mistakes in writing by using English. It seemed that students' problem in writing will still going on considering most writing classes nowadays are tend to have a full-tense and quiet atmosphere. Thus, one of the ways which can be used to arouse the students' interest in writing is by motivating them to write any information about themselves in certain topics. In order to manage a supportive situation for students to write freely, symbols can be used to gain the students' creativity and willingness to write. In fact, symbols are things that represent or stand for something else, especially representing something abstract. In this writing activity, the students were asked to draw some symbols which represent their characteristics, dreams, hopes, or things around them. This way, students were having some time to think over the paragraph they would write after drawing the symbols. Through this consideration, in this research based article, the researcher would like to know whether symbols can help the students in describing themselves easier. This research was done through the Lesson Study activity of the English Education Study Program at STKIP PGRI Pasuruan especially for the second semester students.

**Keywords:** Self-Description; Symbols; Writing

**A. INTRODUCTION**

As stated in the title, the researcher was doing a research on the students' writing. The writing material used in this research is about self-description by using symbols. The students were asked to describe themselves, not the physical description, but more to their characteristics, dreams, and hopes. Before writing, the students were asked to draw some symbols which they consider reflecting their characteristics. The symbols may vary from plants, animals, or other things around them. Symbols were chosen by the researcher to arouse the students' idea in writing. Images are considered useful items to be used as a media in helping the students to start writing their ideas. As many sources present that symbols have various meanings so that the students were able to explore and expand their characteristics into certain symbols that they considered related to their characteristics.

Lai (2006) stated in her research that teaching character words is always a challenging task for teachers because these words are abstract; that is, they exist in the students' thoughts or ideas but do not have a physical or practical existence. Thus, listing many words of characters and let the students choose of any characters is also not practical and yet interesting. Moreover, Garvens (2017) explained that defining oneself is a highly personal process, and no method of defining is “wrong”. Anyone may decide which method of self-description works best for them. In this research, the researcher decided to use symbols to help the students in writing a self-description paragraph instead of listing many words of characters.

Symbols, in this research, mean any object, shape, sign, or character used to represent something else. There are so many symbols that the students may use in describing themselves, among plants, animals, or other things around them. Anything can be a symbol, if they make it one. In literature, symbols are often characters, settings, images, or other motifs that stand in for bigger ideas (literaryterms.net). Kelly and Gargagliano (2014) also added that a symbol is one thing that represents something else. A plant or animal is a good symbol for someone's personality or character. A symbol can also show what someone want to be or their ideal character.

Related to those facts that symbol and characters are interrelated, the researcher tried to put symbols in writing materials. In order to facilitate the students in writing a self-description paragraph easily, the researcher made the students to draw certain symbols which they concern reflected the characters, then write the paragraph based on the drawing. In the end, the researcher wanted to know the students' ability in reflecting their characters into certain symbols and how well they describe those symbols into a self-description paragraph. This way, it is hoped that the students' ideas could be enriched and making them to produce more various words in their writing. Moreover, students are also hoped to be more interested in writing activity since it is usually imaged as a boring activity. Thus, students' creativity will be coloured differently through drawing symbols then enjoying writing activity based on what they have drawn.

## B. MATERIAL & METHODS

This research based article used the Lesson Study steps/procedure in doing the activity; among others are plan, do, and see. The researcher did the "Plan" together with the other teachers who are also teaching in STKIP PGRI Pasuruan. The plan was done a week prior to the open class activity as well as choosing the appropriate material and the teaching media.

After dealing with the plan, the researcher did the open class and being seen by the other members of the team as observers. This "Do" step was done for 2 meetings. Here, the observers examined whether the plan was done well in the class and how it affected the students. Then, the last was doing the "See" step after the open class. The researcher and the observers discussed the findings they found in the classroom and planned a better design for the following open class.

The research was done to the second semester students of Sentence Level Writing class which consisted of 28 students. While the materials of writing self-description through symbols were taken from Writing from Within 1, second Edition in "My Seal" unit which was published in 2014. The result of this research will be described qualitatively since the objective of the research is to find out the students' variety in describing themselves by using symbols.

## C. RESULT & DISCUSSION

Among 28 students, there were 23 students who attended the class and submitted their writing. Below are the symbols that the students used:

Table C.1. Symbols used by the Students

<i>No</i>	<i>Plant</i>	<i>Animal</i>	<i>Others</i>
1.	Orchid	-	Book
2.	Rose	Bee	Sun and cloud
3.	Jasmine	-	4 hearts and earphone
4.	Mimosa	-	Piano and camera
5.	Orange rose	-	Thorns, two green leaves
6.	A lotus	A couple of doves	Umbrella
7.	Tree	Koala	Crown
8.	Red rose	-	Book and 3 stars

<i>No</i>	<i>Plant</i>	<i>Animal</i>	<i>Others</i>
9.	-	Unicorn	Pencil and 2 stars
10.	-	Wolf	Star, chain, shield, sword
11.	-	Crow	Chain and SD card
12.	-	Porcupine	Big star, drum sticks in a wheel, puzzle on rainbow
13.	Rice Plant	-	Mountain, earth
14.	Coconut tree	Squirrel	Sun, moon, 2 stars
15.	-	Porcupine	Balloon, musical sign, drama masks
16.	-	-	Television, microphone, joystick, stars
17.	Rice Plant	-	Water, falling leaves
18.	-	-	A cup of coffee, crown, melody, love
19.	Tree	-	Crown, the sky
20.	-	Bear	Crown
21.	Rose	Bear	Crown, hands & heart
22.	Lotus	-	4 stars
23.	Jasmine	Elephant	Book, 5 stars

Based on the table above, all 23 students preferred to use free symbols other than plants or animals. However, 9 students also add plants in their drawings, the other 6 students add animals, 6 students add both plants and animal's symbols, while the rest 2 students did not add any symbols from plants or animals.

In symbolizing the plants, flowers are the most favorite. Flowers such as: Rose (4), Jasmine (2), Lotus (2), Orchid (1), and Mimosa (1). Other plants such as: Tree (3) and Rice Plant (2). The four students who used Rose were agreed to describe their characters as beautiful/pretty, energetic, elegant, and able to protect themselves. Other two students indicated Jasmine as representing unique, innocent, peace lover, friendly, and introvert characters. Another two students described Lotus as strength, peaceful, and friendly characters. In addition, one student symbolized an Orchid as beautiful, honest, loyal, and unique characters. The final one is Mimosa which is considered as a shy character. Tree and Rice Plant are another plant symbols used by the students. They considered tree as strong and useful characters, while paddy as humble and useful characters.

Based on the students' interpretation above, the researcher found that most students represent their characters into flowers which they concern into positive characters, such as: beauty, innocent, friendly, and honesty. The first symbolize of Rose is in line with Silk & Stone (2017) who symbolized rose as hope, love, beauty, and joy. The second symbolize of Jasmine does not go with FlowerMeaning.com (2017) which stated that Jasmine represent love, beauty, sensuality, appreciation, good luck, and purity. Unmatched symbolizing also occurs in Lotus where Silk & Stone (2017) defined Lotus as birth, rebirth, and a new beginning. Further description on Orchid showed a similar symbolizing which Silk & Stone (2017) called Orchid as perfection. A unique symbolizing stated by the student about **Mimosa whereas, sadly, not in line with In5D (2014)** who stated Mimosa as the symbol of protection, love, prophetic dreams, and purification. In short, among 5 kinds of flowers, only 2 kinds of flowers or 40% of the students' interpretation is suitable with the stated sources.

Other kinds of plants drawn by the students as their character symbols are Tree and Rice Plant. The students' interpretations toward both plants are not all alike with Silk & Stone (2017) who stated that Tree represents prosperity, beauty, strength, endurance, and adversity. In addition, GoodLuckSymbols.com (2017) defined Rice Plant as an ancient symbol of wealth, success, fertility, and good health. Seeing this, the students seemed to have minimum description toward Tree and Rice Plant by only seeing the physical appearance of those plants instead of looking at the implicit values of the plants.

Various symbolizing was used in drawing animals. Among the animals chosen by the students are: Bee (1), Koala (1), Unicorn (1), Wolf (1), Crow (1), Porcupine (2), Squirrel (1),

Bear (2), and Elephant (1). Below is the brief description based on the students' interpretations:

Table C.2. Students' Interpretation toward Animal Symbols

<b>No</b>	<b>Animal</b>	<b>Students' Interpretation</b>
1.	Bee	Talkative, hard-worker, self-protected
2.	Koala	Quiet, calm, funny
3.	Unicorn	Mysterious
4.	Wolf	Intelligence
5.	Crow	Strong, can fly anywhere, reflect a bad instinct
6.	Porcupine	Self protection, defensive system, independent
7.	Squirrel	Active, small, cute
8.	Bear	Grounding forces, strength, cute, cold
9.	Elephant	Big, friendly, has a long-term memory

Based on those symbolizing, the researcher collected some facts related to the symbolic meaning of animals. Below is the table for further explanation:

Table C.3. Symbolic meaning of Animals

<b>No</b>	<b>Animal</b>	<b>Symbolic Meaning</b>
1.	Bee	Celebration, community, organization (Mong, 2002) Diligence, productivity, hard work, sweetness of character, spiritual riches (Silk & Stone, 2017)
2.	Koala	Connection, protection, memory, pleasure, magic, calm, trust (whats-your-sign.com, 2017)
3.	Unicorn	The symbol of the most magical of all animals (universeofsymbolism.com, 2017)
4.	Wolf	Teacher, intuition, learning, the shadow self, pathfinder (Mong, 2002) Fearlessness (Silk & Stone, 2017)
5.	Crow	Magical, shape shifter, watchfulness, sacred law (Mong, 2002)
6.	Porcupine	Faith, innocence, trusting (Mong, 2002)
7.	Squirrel	Gathering, plans ahead, prepared (Mong, 2002)
8.	Bear	Intuition with instinct, primal power, sovereignty, introspection (Mong, 2002) Respect, strength, cunning (Silk & Stone, 2017)
9.	Elephant	Strength, wisdom, solitude, strong sense of loyalty to the family and intelligence (Hallberg, 2014)

Based on the tables above, only 4 animals which is symbolized closely to its inner value. They are: (1) Bee, the hard-worker; (2) Koala, a calm character; (3) Wolf, the intelligence; and (4) Bear, with its strength. The students were focus on the physical appearance of the animals in symbolizing rest of the symbols. As what can be seen in the symbolizing of unicorn, the student stated that a unicorn is mysterious instead of magical. The students also considered reflecting their own physical appearance into the animal symbols, instead of their own character to the animals' symbolic meanings.

The last category in using symbols to write a self-description paragraph is *others*, which means that students may pick any things around them which suited their characteristics, dreams, or hopes. In this part, the researcher classified the symbols into three categories to symbolize: (1) Characteristics; (2) Dreams and Hopes; and (3) Family and friends. The table below might help to see more on the findings collected by the researcher:

Table C.4. Other Symbols used by the Students

<b>No.</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Dreams and Hopes</b>	<b>Family and friends</b>
1.	-	Book	-
2.	-	-	Sun and Cloud
3.	-	Earphone	Hearts
4.	-	Piano and Camera	-
5.	Green leaves	-	-
6.	Umbrella	-	-
7.	Crown	-	-
8.	-	Book	Stars
9.	-	Pencil	Stars
10.	Star, shield and sword	-	Chain
11.	Chain	SD card	-
12.	-	Drum stick in a wheel	Star and rainbow
13.	-	Mountain	Earth
14.	-	-	Sun, moon, stars
15.	Balloon and mask	Musical sign	-
16.	Television	Microphone and joystick	Stars
17.	Water	-	-
18.	A cup of coffee, crown, heart	-	-
19.	The sky	-	Crown
20.	Crown	-	-
21.	Crown	-	-
22.	-	-	Stars
23.	-	Book	Stars

The things chosen by the students were various and they have different symbolizing toward the same thing. In symbolizing Stars, 7 students described that stars represent their family and friends. Only 1 student who described her character by using star, that is to show her faith in God. Another symbol that is symbolized differently is Crown. Crown is usually used by a king or queen as a representation of a leader or something to be taken good care of. There is 1 student who used this symbol to describe her family and friends. While the other 4 students used crown symbol to symbolize their ability to become a leader. Book, as the symbol of education, is also used by 3 students to describe their dreams and passion in reading and knowledge. Those students' interpretation is mostly acceptable since Garvens (2017) explained that defining oneself is a highly personal process, and no method of defining is "wrong". Anyone may decide which method of self-description works best for them.

#### D. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the students' ability in describing themselves by using symbols can be considered good. Since they are able to reflect themselves into the form of plants, animals, or other things related with their characteristics. Though, their interpretation in symbolizing the same thing may differ from one student to another. They tend to pick on beautiful plants such as flowers to represent their positive characters. The animals they chose are mostly reflecting their favorite animals or else covering the physical image of the animals. By looking at those facts, it is necessary to have further experiments in symbolizing things, e.g. plants, animals, or others, and let the students see through the inner value of a symbol, not the physical appearance. This way, then the teachers/researchers might see whether the students would connect to the same value or not.

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