

The narrative text for *Shipwrecked*, below, appeared in a research article by Merritt and Liles (1987) entitled “Story Grammar Ability in Children with and without Language Disorder, Story Generation, Story Retelling and Story Comprehension.” The article appeared in the *Journal of Speech and Hearing Research* when Moreau was a Speech/Language Pathologist at the Curtis Blake Center for Child Development located on the campus of American International College in Springfield, MA. As a member of the diagnostic team she wanted a narrative measure to compare/contrast with measures of reading comprehension and areas of the testing done in the area of neuropsychology. Moreau contacted Donna Merritt of SERC in Connecticut to secure permission to use the probes contained in the article. This was the beginning of a personal friendship and an investigative journey into the vast academic and social applications of narrative competence.

## Story Grammar Analysis of *Shipwrecked*.

(Adapted from Merritt and Liles, 1987.)

This is a multi-episodic story.



*Characters:* Three brothers, who were fishermen.

(If you wish, you could name and describe the brothers:

Sam was the oldest and tallest, and cared for boat.

Joe was the middle in age and size, and loved fishing.

Bill was the youngest and shortest, and took care of the equipment.)



*Setting:* In the hot afternoon sun fishing in the ocean doing what they did every day (boat, fishing, equipment); on an island that had blazing sun

### Episode #1



*Characters:* The boys



*Setting:* Hot afternoon on a boat in the ocean taking a nap, as a break from their work.



*Initiating Event (Kick-Off):* The anchor broke and the boat drifted away, crashing on rocks by night time.



*Internal Response (Feeling):* Frightened.



*Plan:* Wanted to survive.



*Attempt:* Saw an island in the distance.



*Attempt:* Swam to the island.



*Direct Consequence:* The boys were safe.



*Resolution:* The boys were happy to be alive but knew they were lost and probably were frightened and nervous.

## Episode #2



*Characters:* Same



*Setting:* The island under blazing hot sun and nothing to eat or drink. Life was hard. (This is the “*ho-hum*” situation on the island).



*Initiating Event (Kick-Off):* Couldn't find fresh water or food when they looked for it.



*Internal Response (Feeling):* Upset, because without fresh water and food, they knew they would die.



*Mental States:* They *knew* they could survive and find a way home if they worked together.



*Plan:* They wanted to survive and get home so they made a plan to work together to find food and something to drink.



*Attempt:* They made a fire (inferred).



*Attempt:* Found coconuts (drank the milk inside for fluids).



*Attempt:* Caught birds with their bare hands and cooked them.



*Direct Consequence:* The boys had enough to eat and drink.



*Resolution:* They felt good about their food and drink but were still stuck on the island.

## Episode #3



*Characters:* Same



*Setting:* The island when the rainy season began.



*Initiating Event (Kick-Off):* The rainy season began and the boys didn't have any shelter.



*Internal Response (Feeling):* We infer that they were uncomfortable, had no place dry to sleep/cook/work.



*Mental States:* They *knew* they had to find shelter.



*Plan:* The boys decided to build a shelter.



*Attempt:* They found parts of their wrecked boat.



*Attempt:* They found dry wood from fallen trees.



*Attempt:* They tied the wood together making a cabin.



*Direct Consequence:* The boys had shelter when the rains came.



*Resolution:* They were happy in the cabin with food and something to drink but they still missed home.

## Episode #4



*Characters:* Same



*Setting:* The island where they dreamed of returning home, but had food, drink and shelter.



*Initiating Event (Kick-Off):* The boys saw a ship passing the island, one day.



*Internal Response (Feeling):* Excited because maybe they could get home.



*Mental States:* They *knew* that the ship would be able to rescue them and take them home.



*Plan:* To signal the ship hoping to be rescued.



*Attempt:* The boys used their fire to light bushes and send smoke into the sky.



*Attempt:* They saw sailors coming ashore in small boats to rescue them.



*Direct Consequence:* They were going home, having been rescued.



*Resolution:* The boys were relieved after 15 long months on the island to be going home.

Note: This story is actually very complex in its story grammar. There are four episodes, each requiring inference of some type. It was analyzed this way to show both the opportunity for macrostructure and microstructure analysis.

We could also analyze it for its basic story grammar without the details expected in a formal retelling. The details are found in the microstructure, or the way students formulate their syntax to communicate the message. Many students have difficulty including detail. The following is the basic analysis of the macrostructure, for your information:

## Summary:



*Characters:* The boys.



*Setting:* The ocean and then an island.



*Initiating Event (Kick-Off):* The boys were marooned on a deserted island without food, water or shelter.



*Internal Response (Feeling):* Frightened, disgusted at times.



*Mental States:* They *knew* they were lost.

They *remembered* how nice their home is.

They *realized* they had no food, drink, shelter or even fire, at first.



*Plan:* To survive and get home.



*Attempt:* Made a fire (we infer)



*Attempt:* Found drink (coconuts); food (birds)



*Attempt:* Build a shelter



*Attempt:* Signaled a passing ship



*Direct Consequence:* They survived on the island for fifteen months and were rescued by sailors who saw their smoke signal.



*Resolution:* They felt relieved and very thankful.

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Verdick, M. (Ed.) (1973). *Nine daring adventures*. Middletown, CT: Xerox Education Publishing.

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