Teaching *Crazy Iris* by M. Ibuse to Advanced ESL Students

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Primary Reading:


Additional Readings:


For more information on the novel, see the novel’s web site:  
www.robert-barclay.com


For the whole chapter, see the following web site:  
www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/peace site/Index.html

Pre-reading

C. Locate Japan on the map in relation to your country and in relation to the United States. What are the main islands of Japan?

Using either the Internet and/or an encyclopedia, look up Hiroshima. Two very useful web sites are: (1) www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/peacesite/indexE.html and (2) www.city.hiroshima.jp/indexE.html. Write at least two paragraphs about the significance of Hiroshima, especially about what happened there on August 6, 1945. Discuss the lasting world wide effects of that day.

D. To help you understand “Crazy Iris” better, study the following questions before you start reading. Keep them in mind as you read the story.

1. Who is the main character in the story and where and when does the story take place?
2. How many stories are there within the story?
3. What is an iris? Describe it. When does it bloom?
4. What is the crazy iris a metaphor for?
5. Do you think it is possible to have other “crazy iris” today? Why?
E. Now, read the story carefully. Underline words that you do not understand; try to guess their meaning. Do not look them up in your dictionary.

(Insert Crazy Iris))

Vocabulary Study

**A. Guessing from Context:** Using the context in which they are used, guess the meaning of the underlined words in the following sentences. You may go back to the story to look at the surrounding sentences to help you understand the context better. Check if analogy or synonymy or some other device will help you to guess.

1. On display was a motley collection of antique household articles at abnormally low prices.
2. The complaints poured forth monotonously as he hammered away at his door.
3. The students at the Etajima Military Academy (at about the same distance from the city), who were doing their daily gymnastics, were hurled to the ground at the moment of the bombing. All the academy windows facing Hiroshima were shattered.
4. I climbed the hill behind the village and … watched the glow of the burning town. As Fukuyama was hidden by other hills, I could not see the conflagration directly, but the whole side of the hill was bright with the reflection of the flames. At one place, a huge pillar of fire reared itself over the hill crests.
5. Finally the pillar of fire disappeared from sight and the pinpricks of light also vanished.
6. Hiroshima had been destroyed and before that Okayama; Imabari, some distance from the sea, had also been pulverized.
7. That day the stomach trouble from which I had been suffering intermittently became acute.
8. (Yet) when I reached the site of the castle, nothing remained of the great tower but anonymous heaps of earth and tiles. A few people were digging in the debris with shovels of pieces of wood. …
9. As the train rattled on, I felt more and more exasperated with the landlady. Why couldn’t she at least have let me have the jar for safekeeping, even if she didn’t want to sell it? My annoyance was aggravated by the fact that I had to stand all the way to Kwakuni, as the train was packed.
10. The image of that bygone water jar haunts me incessantly. How transient, alas, the beauty of this world,
B. **Idiomatic expressions.** Guess their meanings from context. These are very common and useful idioms. Memorize them and try to use them in both your speech and your writing.

1. When I first **caught sight of** it from the window of my friend’s house, I thought it was a piece of colored tissue paper floating on the pond. … (catch sight of)
2. Hey, Mason, what are you up to? (be up to)
3. We had been **brought up** together as children. (bring up)
4. Now that they’ve issued the evacuation order, I’ll be **clearing out** as soon as I can get things into shape. (clear out; get things into shape)
5. It was some time now since I had first asked the landlady to sell me the jar, but she had refused on the grounds that she might need it should the water-supply ever be **cut off**. (on the grounds that; cut off)
6. “Even the railway people don’t know what’s **holding up** the trains.” (hold up)
7. “Well, well, Masu,” he said as he saw me, “so they’ve finally ordered us to clear out. It’s going to be quite a job for us here at the clinic, I can tell you.” (quite a job)
8. “I expect the bombers will make a **thorough job of it**. (a thorough job of it)
9. Just a few days before, his only son, who had volunteered as a junior pilot, had been killed, and the news seemed to have **taken all life out of him**. (take all life out of)
10. He lay silently in the back and before long he fainted. When he came to, he found that they had arrived at some town he did not recognize. (before long; come to)
11. “What do you blasted Kempei think you’re doing?” someone shouted from the crowd. “Still trying to **throw your weight around**?” (throw one’s weight around)
12. A few others took up the cry. “Pretty **stuck-up**, aren’t you.” “Remember you’ve **had your day now**!” (take up the cry; be stuck-up; have one’s day)
13. This second raid seemed to have been too much for her. She went off her rocker!” (be too much for someone; go clean off one’s rocker)

C. **Guessing on your own:** On 3x5 cards, copy the full sentence in which each of the words you underlined are used. Guess what it means. Write your guess under the sentence. Now, look up the word in your dictionary. Find the appropriate meaning and write it on the back of your card. Check whether your guess matches the dictionary meaning. Guess again if the two don’t match. You must have at least ten cards.

**Comprehension-Appreciation Exercises**

A. Answer the following questions. They are designed to show that you have understood the entire story with most of its details. You will find all the answers in the story if you can’t answer the questions right away.

1. Who is the main character of the story? Where does he live? How far is his town from Hiroshima?
2. The story opens “at about noon on the day Hiroshima was bombed.” Do the people of Fukuyama already know about the bombing in Hiroshima at this time? Why are they getting ready to leave the town?
3. How do the people of Fukuyama learn about the bombing of Hiroshima? Tell the story of Mr. Kobayashi.
4. Who is Mr. Yasuhara? Describe his reaction to the situation – to the war and the evacuation orders. Summarize his story.

5. What other stories are told within the story? Re-tell each one briefly. Tell about the landlady and her water jar.

6. Describe Fukuyama after the night raid two days after the Hiroshima bombing. Describe the feelings of the village people as they watch it burning at a distance.

7. What is the “volunteers’ illness”? Who are afflicted by it? Who is the village doctor and how does he treat the illness?

8. Describe the village people’s trip to the reserve stores” and what they find when they get there. Make a list of items that are distributed to the village people.

9. Given the situation they are in, what do you think is the printing paper for? How important are the paper rolls and the shovels? Are these necessities that people need?

10. Narrate the incident that takes place in Mr. Kiuchi’s home in Tokyo.

11. Narrate the story of the writer, the cabinet maker and his sister, as Masu tells it to Mr. Kiuchi.

B. Answer the following questions. You won’t find their answers in the story. You need to use inference to be able to answer them. Use the contexts within the story, your experiences and knowledge of the world, and whatever other information you have to relate to the questions and the story.

1. What is the significance of the water jar at the inn?
2. Explain why Mr. Kiuchi would not look at what is in the pond in his garden.
3. Mr. Kiuchi’s father exclaimed, “It’s amazing! Think of an iris blooming at this time of year!” Why is it amazing? What is the blooming season for iris? What time of year is it now? Why do you think it is in bloom?
4. The iris looks like “a piece of purple tissue paper.” Why, do you think, does it look like “tissue paper”?
5. Mr. Kiuchi says to him, “There’s all the difference in the world, you know, between the iris in your story and the flower down there in the pond. They belong to completely different periods.” Do you agree or disagree with Mr. Kiuchi? Explain.
6. What is the iris a metaphor for? Why is it referred to in the story as “crazy iris”?
7. Does what the cabinet maker do for his sister in the pond “crazy” or “not crazy”? Explain your answer.
8. Can you think of other kinds of “crazy iris” in the world today? Give an example and explain why it is a “crazy iris”?
9. Can you think of ways to prevent the iris and other forms of life from turning “crazy”?

Complementary Reading

Look up the Marshall Islands on the map. Locate them in relation to your native country, to Japan, and to the United States. What other islands are near the Marshall Islands? Using the Internet and the encyclopedia as sources, write two or more paragraphs about the island and its people and culture. Include information regarding atomic testing in the Pacific. Useful web sites are: (1) www.rmiembassy.org and (2) www.bkiniatoll.com.
Read the following excerpts from *Melål: A Novel of the Pacific* by Robert Barclay. See if there are any “crazy iris” in these excerpts. Make a list.

Answer the following questions after reading the excerpts.

1. Are there similarities in the events related here to the events related in *Crazy Iris*?
2. What is the relevance of *Crazy Iris* and *Melål* to today’s world situation?
3. What countries in the world today have atomic weapons?
4. Should countries have atomic weapons in order to deter or stop other countries from attacking them (that is, scare other countries so that they will not attack)?
5. Should countries have atomic weapons in order to be able to defend themselves if they are attacked?


**Independent Reading**

Read the following for additional background information on the bombing of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945.

(Insert *The Pacific War and the A-Bomb* by the Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation, from www.admin@city.hiroshima.jp)

**Writing-Responding Exercises**

War is a terrible thing that causes a lot of suffering, deaths, and unspeakable other losses. Many people believe that nothing can justify war at any time anywhere. Yet some people think there are situations or circumstances that can justify war. This disagreement among people gives rise to debates regarding the use of atomic bombs or other weapons of destruction in whatever form and also discussions on effects of such weapons upon people and the environment.

A. Work in groups of three or four. Pick one of the following topics and discuss it among yourselves. Appoint one person in the group to take notes of everybody’s ideas. Write a group summary of your ideas after your discussion. Share your summary with the class.

C. Write a 5-paragraph essay of the topics below. Your choice may be the same as what you discussed with your group or it may be a different one.

Give a well-focused introduction that you will guide you to the structure of your body paragraphs. Use examples or details from the stories you have read to support your main ideas. Include material you found from your Internet or encyclopedia research. Write a good conclusion that clearly defines your position on the topic you have chosen.
1. War is a terrible thing that cannot be justified anywhere at any time. Explain why this is or is not true. Are there any situations or circumstances that would justify a war?

2. Discuss some lessons you have learned from your brief study of the Hiroshima bombing through the stories you have read.

3. Discuss some of the possible effects of the use of atomic bombs and other weapons of destruction on people, whether children or adults, using Hiroshima and the Marshall Islands as examples of such possible destruction. Effects could be long term or short term. Give examples.

4. Discuss some of the possible effects of war and the use of weapons of destruction upon the environment, whether long term or short term. Give examples from your readings and/or your own experience.

5. Reconstruction after the devastation caused by war and its accompanying weapons of destruction is always necessary. What measures need to be taken to restore or reconstruct a place that has been devastated by war, such as happened in Hiroshima?

6. You saw countless pictures on television of the war in Iraq. You have also probably heard of the reconstruction plans being discussed for Iraq. Discuss some simple ways in which you think Iraq can be restored or reconstructed after all the devastation that has taken place in that country.

7. Has your country of origin been the victim of a long-drawn war where weapons of destruction were used? If so, discuss the effects of that war on the people and the environment of your country. Give specific examples.

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