

## “JUST LIKE PEYTON PLACE, TEACHER!”

### Josephine Wee

In September 1978, I was sent out on Teaching Practice, as a part of the Diploma ESL course run by the Pusat Bahasa, University of Malaya. I was sent to SMJK Sri Pantain, Kampung Kerinchi, Kuala Lumpur. I was given two classes of English to teach. Both were Form Two classes. There were 45 boys and girls in each class.

In the course of a group discussion one day during Teaching Practice, one of the lecturers in charge of our group casually mentioned that the New Straits Times was serialising a very good picture-story every Friday. It was in a supplement called “Friday Flair”. The title was: “The Princess of Gunung Ledang” by Raja Hamzah. Immediately, there was much excitement among my colleagues. All of them, apparently, were following the series, and they proceeded to discuss the merits of the story in great detail. I sat silent among them, relegated once again to the role of the class idiot – a part I was destined to play many times during my stay at the University. I had neither heard of, nor seen, nor read, the picture-story.

As soon as I got home that day, I plunged into my stack of old newspapers and managed to get all the past instalments of the picture-story. The story was, without doubt, excellent reading material. The pictures were beautifully drawn, the words were not too difficult to read and understand, the story itself was an age-old legend, much loved by Malaysians. I was determined to use the series for my reading lessons.

Each week’s story-part was cut out and edited. Pictures with too much detail were discarded. The words and pictures which I wanted were pasted on quarto-size cartridge paper. The page was numbered. Sometimes, a week’s story-part fitted into one page; sometimes it took two pages. When the story was complete, each page was xeroxed – forty-five times! Each pupil, therefore, could have his/her individual copy.

I then wrote out the story attached to the pictures and taped it, reading it at normal speed with, what I hoped, was correct pronunciation and intonation. Then I cyclostyled a second handout for the pupils. This was the exercise based on the reading. Sometimes it took the form of answering objective-type questions; at other times the pupils had to fill in the blanks based on a Unit taught, or to give Yes/No, True/False answers.

Wednesday afternoons was Reading time. As soon as I entered the class, I distributed the picture-story for that week. The pupils were told to look at the pictures and read the words silently. Then the taped story was played. The pupils were told to follow the story on their picture as they listened to the tape. The taped story was played a second time to ensure that the pupils understood the story. When the tape was played a third time, the pupils had to read aloud the parts of the different characters (in chorus). Then the tape was switched off. I read the narration and individual pupils took the parts of the various characters. Lastly, the second handout was distributed. This was often very short and very easy. Pupils finished it in less than five minutes. The last part of the lesson was the dramatisation of the picture-story. Soon, this became the highlight of the reading lessons.

HANDOUT 1 : PICTURE

HANG NADIM AND HIS MEN ENTERED THE PALACE.

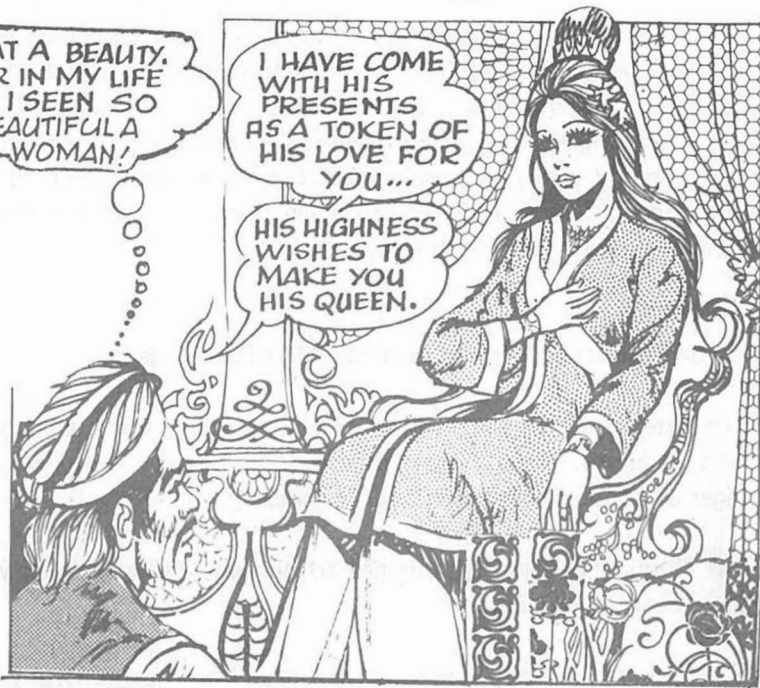
PRINCESS GUNUNG LEDANG WAS SEATED ON A THRONE MADE OF GOLD AND EMERALDS.



WHAT A BEAUTY. NEVER IN MY LIFE HAVE I SEEN SO BEAUTIFUL A WOMAN!

I HAVE COME WITH HIS PRESENTS AS A TOKEN OF HIS LOVE FOR YOU...

HIS HIGHNESS WISHES TO MAKE YOU HIS QUEEN.



MAKE ME HIS QUEEN?



THE PRINCESS DID NOT SEEM INTERESTED IN THE PRESENTS LAID BEFORE HER.

All the weekly instalments were paper-clipped together and handed out each Wednesday. That way, pupils could refer to previous instalments if the exercise for that day dealt with a prior event. It was also useful when I asked the pupils to recapitulate earlier episodes of the story. By the time the story ended, there were sixteen pages in all. The pupils gave this weekly reading session the dubious distinction of being "Just like Peyton Place, teacher."

In retrospect, there are far better, and cheaper ways of duplicating such picture-stories. Kind friends have, after seeing my humble efforts, called me all kinds of a fool for having spent so much money on so simple a project. But I think back to all the fun I had with those marvellous Kampung Kerinchi pupils every Wednesday afternoon, and I believe that it was money, time and effort very well spent. I still have forty-five copies of "The Princess of Gunung Ledang" which I still use to teach reading – and listening, of course, and which still give me and my pupils much joy.

**Samples:**

**TAPESCRIPT**

The Princess of Gunung Ledang – Part IV – Page 8

Hang Nadim and his men entered the palace. Princess Gunung Ledang was seated on a throne made of gold and emeralds. Hang Nadim introduced himself, "I am Hang Nadim," he said, "a messenger of Sultan Mahmud Shah of Malacca."

As he spoke to Princess Gunung Ledang, he thought to himself, "What a beauty! Never in my life have I seen so beautiful a woman!"

The Princess did not say anything, so Hang Nadim continued, "I have come with his presents as a token of his love for you...." Still the Princess was silent. Then Hang Nadim said, "His Highness wishes to make you his Queen."

At last the Princess spoke. "Make me his Queen?" she said.

The Princess did not seem interested in the presents laid before her.

**HANDOUT 2** Exercise: The Princess of Gunung Ledang – Part IV – Page 8

Name:.....

Form:.....

Language Structure: Unit 37 (Adjective after Object)

Use these words to fill in the blanks. They are not in the correct order:

uninteresting – beautiful – priceless – useless

1. Hang Nadim thought Princess Gunung Ledang \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Hang Nadim kept talking to the Princess although he felt his efforts \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The Princess thought the presents \_\_\_\_\_.
4. From what we have read, we think the Princess's throne \_\_\_\_\_.