

## EM PLOYING M ARY W HITEBIRD'S SHORT STORY *TA-NA-E-KA* TO RAISE STUDENT'S ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS

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### ABSTRAK

*Karya sastra dipergunakan sebagai media untuk mengajarkan kepedulian lingkungan kepada pembacanya karena kandungan cerita yang menyajikan kehidupan sosial, politik, fakta sejarah dan termasuk ekologi. Beberapa cerita karya sastra pun ditulis berdasarkan fakta yang sebenarnya. Budaya dan bahasa yang menggambarkan pun merupakan hal yang autentik, yakni dapat digunakan langsung sebagai media pembelajaran bahasa dan pengenalan budaya kepada para pembaca. Penelitian ini melibatkan mahasiswa dan cerita pendek karya Mary Whitebird berjudul Ta-Na-E-Ka. Ta-Na-E-Ka menawarkan tema yang berhubungan dengan isu lingkungan hidup dan Ecocriticism adalah teori yang tepat untuk menganalisa fenomena tersebut. Ecocriticism menghubungkan sastra dengan isu lingkungan hidup dimana cerpen Ta-Na-E-Ka menampilkan alam semesta dan kehidupan alam di dalam ceritanya. Mahasiswa dilibatkan sebagai pembaca dan dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, data yang diperoleh dari hasil kuestionair mahasiswa dipergunakan untuk menjawab tujuan penelitian. Pertama, mengungkap kemampuan mahasiswa memahami penggambaran alam semesta dan hubungannya dengan manusia melalui tokoh dan penokohan dan tema. Kedua adalah untuk menunjukkan bagaimana mahasiswa menangkap dan memahami isu alam semesta, lingkungan hidup dan hubungan mereka terhadap manusia dalam hal ini adalah Suku Indian Kaws. Kedua tujuan tersebut sesuai dengan prinsip yang terdapat pada ecocriticism. Mahasiswa mampu menunjukkan sifat lebih peduli terhadap lingkungan alam dan kepedulian terhadap alam pun mereka miliki. Hasil ini menguatkan kebermanfaatan sastra sebagai media ajar and sebagai bahan autentik asli untuk mengajarkan arti nilai-nilai penghargaan terhadap alam.*

**Kata Kunci:** *cerita pendek, ecocriticism, kelas Reading, sastra*

### ABSTRACT

This paper proposes Mary Whitebird's *Ta-Na-E-Ka* to be used as the teaching material to raise students' ecological awareness based on the research conducted in the English Department, Jenderal Soedirman University, Purwokerto, Indonesia. This is because literature is believed to represent authentic social, political, ecological, and historical events from a particular range of periods, so literature can be employed as authentic teaching material to teach both the language and culture embedded in it. In this particular study, Mary Whitebird's *Ta-Na-E-Ka* was chosen because it offers a distinct ecological theme. The literary theory exercised is Ecocriticism, i.e. the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment; it celebrates nature, the life force, and the wilderness told in the story. This qualitative study employs the data gained from the readers' questionnaire. It successfully probes the readers' understanding of the elements of the story, e.g., characters and characterization and theme; it also shows that students are able to capture

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the issue of nature, physical environment and their relationship with the Kaws as it is proposed by ecocriticism. Therefore, the readers, who are students, become the ecocritics; they are more caring to the world and its nature. In other words, their ecological awareness has sharpened eventually, and Mary Whitebird's *Ta-Na-E-Ka* has been successfully used both as the teaching material and as the authentic material to understand the ecocentric value narrated in the story.

**Keywords:** ecocriticism, literature, reading class, short story

## INTRODUCTION

As composition, literature has some functions in life. As suggested by Roberts (2003:2), literature may tell stories, dramatize situations, express emotions, and analyze and advocate ideas. This means that inside literature in its many different forms, e.g., novels, short stories, poems, plays, both fiction and nonfiction, there must be depiction of lives, feelings and even particular situations that can help the readers learn and take benefits. Robert also emphasizes that literature can even help people grow both “personally and intellectually” due to its ability to open and stretch the readers’ minds after they finish reading a particular literary work. Besides, an earlier study has concluded that literature represents authentic social, political and historical events from a particular range of periods, so literature can be employed as authentic teaching material to teach both the language and culture embedded in it (Trisnawati, 2008). This means that it is possible to utilize literature in real life, namely, in English teaching and learning process.

There must be some reasons why literature can be utilized as authentic teaching material. According to Collie and Slater (1994:3), literature offers a bountiful and extremely varied body of written material which is so important that it says something about fundamental human issues. The presented issues in those works are authentic since they are not fashioned and or designed for the specific purpose of teaching language. To this extend, literature can be genuinely utilized as teaching material meaning that it can be directly used as teaching material to teach both the language and the culture depicted in the literary works. Some other reasons proposed

by Lazar (1993:15) are because literary texts have a powerful function in raising moral and ethical concerns in the classroom; they help the students unravel the many things in a text; and lastly, literary texts can be used as the basis for generating discussion, controversy and critical thinking in the classroom. Because of these valuable functions of literary texts, a teacher of literature subject must be able to utilize the texts not only in literary subjects but also in some other subjects such as Reading.

In relation to its urgency, this study is conducted due to the fact mentioned above that literature can also be utilized as authentic teaching material and it is to promote and to discuss a particular fundamental human issue being told in the story. In this case, one fundamental human issue studied is about nature and the physical environment reflected in the story of one literary work i.e., a short story and this particular short story is utilized as the teaching medium in the classroom. Mary Whitebird's *Ta-Na-E-Ka*, which depicts the relationship of an Indian tribe with nature is proposes to be used as authentic teaching material to raise students’ ecological awareness. The short story is selected because it contains the celebration of nature and the condition of Indian people represented by the Kaws, a traditional tribe living in the reservation. Furthermore, it is because the Kaws are able to show the readers that they can live hand-in-hand with nature by preserving the tradition in their tribe. If such a text is read and consumed by the young people, it enables them to learn and reflect themselves that it is necessary to preserve nature and traditions as human beings living in the Mother Earth. Thus, this becomes the main urgency of conducting this study.

The study involves students of the 2012 Reading for Survival Class in the English Department, Jenderal Soedirman University, Purwokerto, Indonesia, by employing one short story entitled *Ta-Na-E-Ka* written by Mary Whitebird as its reading text or its teaching material. At this point, the chosen literary work is taken as the authentic teaching material, for the short story is directly used as the reading text without any modification. Employing Mary Whitebird's *Ta-Na-E-Ka* in the Reading for Survival Class, the study attempts to show that it is possible to employ a piece of literary work as meaningful teaching material for the students especially to discuss ecological issues, e.g., nature and physical environment, and eventually literature can be utilized to raise the students' awareness of ecological issues presented in the short story. Also, it attempts to answer the research questions, namely, how students understand the elements of the story, e.g., characters and theme, depicted in Mary Whitebird's *Ta-Na-E-Ka* and how they capture the issue of nature, physical environment and their relationship with the Kaws as it is proposed by ecocriticism.

## ECOCRITICISM IN LITERATURE

As mentioned earlier, literature has been 'born' to have various themes and some fundamental issues presented in it. Nature and the physical environment, or so-called ecological issues, are also common to be presented in the story of literature. This particular theme has been told in some pieces of work as a place to share the depiction of nature, the physical environment and their relationship with human beings. Moreover, it also has attracted some authors from all over the world to write some literary works concerned with nature and the physical environment. For example, Kumari Shikha in his article *Ecocriticism in Indian Fiction* (2011) mentions some Indian fictions that "celebrate" this issue and they gain so much attention in Indian Literature. This is because

the idea of nature and the physical environment is wider; it not only discusses ecology as the dominant issue, but also discusses the control of nature over human beings, the on-going natural depletion, and many more (Shikha, 2011). This study has won the attention of authors across continents. Thus, this particular study which employs Mary Whitebird's *Ta-Na-E-Ka* as one of the Indian Native American short stories attempts to show that ecological issues have become part of world of literature.

In the discussion of literary criticism, the study of nature, the physical environment, and their relationship with human beings depicted or found in literature is called ecocriticism. Ecocriticism has been defined variously by some scholars; yet, in fact, the practice of ecocriticism in the study of literature has also invited some long debates as it is not considered appropriate to be exercised in literary analysis. However, mentioning ecocriticism as inappropriate practice for literary analysis is actually somewhat misleading; thus, future literary critics must understand first the very basic analogy of ecocriticism derived from the study of ecology. According to Tošić (2006), ecocriticism is a semineologism, some kind of new *ism* in the discourse as it was newly developed in the early 1990s. The word *Eco* is short for ecology—concerned with the relationships between living organisms in their natural environment as well as their relationships with that environment. Therefore, by analogy, ecocriticism is concerned with the relationships between literature and environment or how man's relationships with his physical environment are reflected in literature. Thus, these are obviously interdisciplinary studies, unusual as a combination of a natural science and a humanistic discipline—literary studies.

Furthermore, William Rueckert in Opperman (1999) defines ecocriticism as the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of Literature, and ecocriticism addresses in its attempt to find a more environmentally conscious

position in literary studies. This definition has enlightened the practice of ecocriticism in literary analysis as its focus is to see literary works from the perspective of environmental issues depicted in some literary works. In addition to what an ecocritic must do in his literary analysis, Peter Barry, a literary scholar, defines Ecocriticism as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment; it celebrates nature, the life force, and the wilderness told in the story (Barry, 2002). The word 'celebrate' is meant to be the exploration of nature in the text, and to realize the fact that "nature really exists, out there beyond ourselves", and it presents an "entity which affects us and which we can affect, perhaps fatally if we mistreat it". By this definition, Barry proposes the application of ecocriticism as the critical lens to analyze the depiction of how nature affects people, and people affect nature along with their consequences if people mistreat nature found in the literature. At last, this is in line with what has been proposed by Shikha (2011) that this approach shifts critical focus from social relations toward natural relationships and views the individual as a member of ecosystem. It values highly the 'literary sense of place' not as setting but as an essential expression of bonding with or alienation from a specific natural context.

A clearer concept of applying ecocriticism is proposed by Glotfelty and Fromm (1996:xviii) who argue that ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Further, it is illustrated just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies. Ecocriticism also investigates how nature is represented in literature. According to Glotfelty and Fromm (1996:xviii-xix), such questions as how nature is represented in this sonnet, what role the physical setting plays in the plot of this novel, whether the values expressed in this play are consistent with

ecological wisdom, how our metaphors of the land influence the way we treat in, how we can characterize nature writing as a genre are often taken as the underlying questions for analyzing one literary work using ecocriticism. Thus, it elaborates how a piece of literary work can possibly be analyzed using ecocriticism. Thus, it elaborates how a piece of literary work can possibly be analyzed using ecocriticism.

In this paper, ecocriticism is used as the underlying concept for placing Mary Whitebird's *Ta-Na-E-Ka* as one piece of literary work in which the celebration of nature and the physical environment and their relationship with human beings can be found. As mentioned earlier that a piece of literary work is also believed to be applicable as teaching material, this study presents the utilization of Mary Whitebird's *Ta-Na-E-Ka* as teaching material in the Reading for Survival Class Year 2012 in the English Department of Jenderal Soedirman University.

In the study, students of the Reading for Survival Class were the readers of the short story. They were required to express their ideas and interpretation to show their understanding of nature and the physical environment and their relationship with human beings depicted there. The readers were asked to learn the reading text—MaryWhitebird's *Ta-Na-E-Ka*—as the teaching material of the Reading for Survival Class; next, their ecological awareness was stimulated and shown by their written comment and interpretation, and finally they could also feel the celebration of nature proposed by the ecocriticism as told and depicted in the story. Therefore, using the qualitative-descriptive analytic study, the researcher obtained the data from both the short story and the students' responses to the questions in the questionnaires distributed to them. 28 students were involved because the story was purposely used as the teaching material of the class, and then their ideas and interpretation of this particular work were required as part of the data of the study. A set of questions were prepared to assess the students and to be included in the

questionnaire of the study. The following are the questions asked in line with the concept of ecocriticism discussed above:

1. In your opinion, what is the theme of the short story?
2. Who are the characters? How are they characterized?
3. In your opinion, how do the Kaws perceive/consider the environment in their life? Mention the parts of the short story that support your answer.
4. After reading *Ta-Na-e-Ka*, do you think the Kaws have a close relationship with the environment? (In this case, environment can be represented by the wood, and nature). Explain your answer.
5. After reading *Ta-Na-E-Ka*, do you learn anything about the environment from the story? Can you mention the parts? Explain your answer.

Questions number 1 and 2 were designed to assess the students' understanding of the theme and the characters within the short story. In addition, questions 3-5 were used to elicit the students' ability to capture the issue of ecocriticism and their ecological awareness. Actually questions 3-5 were used to position the students as the ecocritics of Mary Whitebird's *Ta-Na-E-Ka*. Then, the collected data were analyzed to answer the research questions.

### **ECOCRITICISM IN MARY WHITEBIRD'S *TA-NA-E-KA***

*Ta-Na-E-Ka* is a short story written by Mary Whitebird, an Indian Native American. The story tells about Mary—a younger girl from the Kaws, or Kansa Indians of Native Americans living in the reservation. Mary is entering her eleven years old marked as the “flowering of adulthood”; therefore, she must do the *Ta-Na-E-Ka* ceremony. The Kaws regard *Ta-Na-E-Ka* as a test of survival. Formerly, when the Kaws performed *Ta-Na-E-Ka*, they were painted white with the juice of a scared

herb and were sent naked into the wilderness without even a knife for eighteen days (Whitebird in Goodman, 2003). However, nowadays, *Ta-Na-E-Ka* is differently performed. Mary is going to be sent barefoot and in bathing suits, into the woods for five days (Whitebird in Goodman, 2003). It is obviously seen that Mary Whitebird's *Ta-Na-E-Ka* tells a story to its readers about nature and the physical environment and their relationship with human beings such as the wilderness, the woods and the Kaws.

In addition, Whitebird also depicts the mutual relationship between nature, the physical environment and the Kaws as shown in the quotations below:

... It took almost eighteen days. During that time we had to stay alive—trapping the food, eating insects and roots and berries, and watching out our enemies. And we did have enemies—the white soldiers and the Omaha warriors...(Whitebird in Goodman, 2003:127)

... The sun was shining and it was warm, but my bare feet began to hurt immediately. I spied one of the berry bushes Grandfather had told us about. “You are lucky,” he had said. “The berries are ripe in the spring, and they are delicious and nourishing.” They were orange and fat and I popped one into my mouth. (Whitebird in Goodman, 2003:127)

Whitebird has strongly shown how the Kaws have a wonderful relationship with nature and the physical environment where they can rely themselves on the woods, the wilderness to feed them. The insects, roots, and berries are things found in the woods to support their daily food. Whitebird also tries to emphasize that even the season has something meaningful for their life during the *Ta-Na-E-Ka*. Thus, the meaning of physical environment as the ‘where’ factor is really depicted here having a close relationship with human beings. This is in line with what Gilpin (in Tošić, 2006:46) states regarding a more specific definition of physical environment, which includes “the built environment, the natural environment, and all natural resources, including air, land and water”. Further, he also notes the

environment as “the combination of elements whose complex interrelationships make up the settings, the surroundings and the conditions of life of the individual and of society, *as they are or as they are felt*” (Tošić, 2006:47). Here, the Kaws and their *Ta-Na-E-Ka* being told in the story have shown the readers that the woods, the wilderness and all elements in them have made up complex relationship so that the Kaws considers them as meaningful settings, the ‘built environment’ where they do feel the benefit of that particular physical environment. To conclude, Mary Whitebird’s *Ta-Na-E-Ka* has exposed its quality to be called as a piece of literary work having the quality of vocalizing the celebration of nature and the physical environment as it is proposed by ecocriticism.

#### **STUDENTS’ UNDERSTANDING ON MARY WHITEBIRD’S *TA-NA-E-KA***

The fact that the students understand the short story, its theme, its characters and characterization depicted in Mary Whitebird’s *Ta-Na-E-Ka* can be derived from their answers in the questionnaires and from their active responses during the class discussion. The story of *Ta-Na-E-Ka* is presented in an easy-to-understand language so that almost all students can easily comprehend and get the main points being asked in the study. The theme of Mary Whitebird’s *Ta-Na-E-Ka* is placed as the first point asked to the students. Surprisingly, based on their answers, there are two main themes expressed by the students, namely, Mary Whitebird’s *Ta-Na-E-Ka* is firstly about tradition, custom, heritage shown by the Indian Tribe—the Kaws, and secondly it is about the *Ta-Na-E-Ka*—flowering of adulthood—that is, a ceremony celebrating the process of initiating an eleven-year-old boy or girl into manhood or womanhood conducted by the Kaws.

The first theme proposed by the students is described in some different ways of expression, yet they have similar meanings. The students are able to sense that the atmosphere of preserving

the tradition, the custom, the heritage of doing *Ta-Na-E-Ka* done by the Kaws is very strong. Using various words, sentences and expressions, 14 out of 28 students generally answer that Mary Whitebird’s *Ta-Na-E-Ka* is about one traditional custom of the Kaws, and the heritage of the Indian people and it is also about a tradition passed from generation to generation in the Kaw tribe, some of their answers are shown in the following quotations:

The theme is about *Ta-Na-E-Ka* that is a kind of tradition in Kaw tribe so they need to do it. When they are eleven years old, it can prove that they were ready for adulthood and preparing their self to deal with the challenges of real life. (datum 13)

The theme is about Kaws Indian Tribe who needs to do the *Ta-Na-E-Ka* because that is the custom/ heritage of *Ta-Na-E-Ka* of Kaw Indian. If kids are already 11 years old, kids will participate *Ta-Na-E-Ka*. It is to prove that kids were ready for adulthood, the flowering of adulthood. Kids will learn about surviving of *Ta-Na-E-Ka*, (datum 3).

The theme is about a form of heritage inherited from ancient that train people for independent and strong since they were 11 years old. It is called *Ta-Na-E-Ka*, (datum 14).

The above quotations reflect that the theme of the story that they can get is about the tradition and heritage of *Ta-Na-E-Ka*. They can explain it very clearly. This is because the message of the short story strongly promotes the preservation of the traditions of Native Americans, in this case, the Kaw Tribe.

Furthermore, some students are also able to support their answers using some reasons why the theme is about the custom, the tradition and the heritage of *Ta-Na-E-Ka* in the Kaws. Two students argue that the Kaws preserve the traditional custom because the Kaws have a close relationship with their environment. This actually indicates that the students are also able to recognize the issue of nature and its relationship with human beings early in the beginning of discussing the short story.

Thus, they are fully aware of the ecological issues depicted in the short story. The theme is about preserving the tradition and the tradition has close connection with the nature. Furthermore, the two students also add that the theme is about tradition, namely, *Ta-Na-E-Ka*, and they (the Kaw) are willing to do *Ta-Na-E-Ka* in the woods, eat from it, and use the wood to fulfill their necessity. The quotations have shown the students' responses to the question about the theme of the short story, that is, about the Kaw's tradition, custom and heritage preserved by doing *Ta-Na-E-Ka*, and some students are also able to recognize their reasons for preserving the tradition, namely, the Kaw have a close relationship with nature, Mother Earth.

The next theme proposed by the students is about the test of survival to prove that someone is moving to adulthood. The theme is about a test of flowering adulthood. This is the main point summed up from the students' answers to one of the questions in the questionnaires. 12 out of 28 students mentioned this particular idea as the theme of Mary Whitebird's *Ta-Na-E-Ka*. The quotations below illustrate some of the students' answers to the question about the theme of the short story.

The theme is about the Kaw's Indiana Tribe that needed to do the *Ta-Na-E-Ka* because *Ta-Na-E-Ka* is a kind of test of survival to prove that they were ready for adulthood, (datum 15).

The theme is about a test of survival to prove that they were ready for adulthood, (datum 17).

The theme is about a kind of test of survival to prove that they were ready for adulthood. The test included living alone in the woods for five days without food and living on insect, (datum 19).

That Mary Whitebird's *Ta-Na-E-Ka* mostly tells about *Ta-Na-E-Ka* as a form of test of survival has really guided the students to mention this as the theme of the short story. Interestingly, some of the students are also able to connect

the theme with the celebration of nature that is performed by the Kaw as it is told in the story. They try to relate that the test of survival, *Ta-Na-E-Ka*, is done because the Kaw has close relationship with nature; therefore, the survival test is done in the woods, in the forest where it is seen as the important place of the Kaw people.

The next way to check the students' understanding is to ask them to mention the characters and characterization. In this part, almost all students can mention the characters very well, and they also can support their explanations by giving the characterization of those characters. Mary is the main character and she is illustrated as a brave and honest girl. The students identify her as a brave girl because she wants to do *Ta-Na-E-Ka*. Although she cheats during the test of survival, yet she is still brave to confess and to be honest to tell the truth that she did not really stay in the woods. This reason is just in line with what has been argued by other students. Mary's grandfather is placed as the second main character. Some others are Mary's teacher, Mary's cousin and Ernie, the man who "helped" Mary during her *Ta-Na-E-Ka*. Mary's teacher is Mrs. Richardson; she is very tolerant as she allows every student from the reservation to do any tradition and she gives them their days-off. It is considered as a good characterization of Mrs. Richardson seen by the students of the Reading of Survival Class. Last is Ernie. He is seen as the minor character, yet he is important. Ernie is the one who coincidentally helps Mary by providing a place to stay. Ernie is sincere and Mary is happy to know him. Thus, the students are able to see these characters and explain their characterization. The ability of the students to successfully mention and explain the characters and characterization in this short story has reflected that students are fully aware of the issue underlining the story, namely, the ecological issue. This can be seen from their explanations as they always relate the characters with their parts in the *Ta-Na-E-Ka* traditional ceremony of celebrating nature done by the Kaw's.

### STUDENTS' ECOCRITICISM ON MARY WHITEBIRD'S TA-NA-E-KA

Previously, Whitebird's *Ta-Na-E-Ka* has been discussed as a story having some ecological issues depicted through its theme, namely, about the Ta-Na-E-Ka as a test of survival that has been done to preserve the tradition of the Kaws. Due to its story, Mary Whitebird's *Ta-Na-E-Ka* depicts the relationship of the Kaws and the environment that is the woods as the place of doing the Ta-Na-E-Ka. In line with what has been proposed by the ecocriticism, the participants of this study, namely, the students of the Reading for Survival Class are expected to understand and to catch the issue of nature, environment, and its relationship with the Kaws; in addition, in the end of the study, the students are also taught and stimulated by their awareness on ecological issues. Therefore, the first part of the second discussion will be exploring on how the students perceive the value of the nature celebration depicted in Whitebird's *Ta-Na-E-Ka* through their responses written in their questionnaire.

The students' answers are various, yet their answers lead to what has been believed by the principles of ecocriticism. The first question to explore the students' understanding on the ecocriticism found in the depiction of Whitebird's *Ta-Na-E-Ka* is what the students think of the ways the Kaws perceive or consider the environment in the life of the Kaw people. Some of their answers are explained below.

The first most frequent answer given by the students is the following:

Kaw Tribe very considers the environment because they do the Ta-Na-E-Ka in the woods and eat from it; they use the woods to fulfill their necessity during the Ta-Na-E-Ka, (datum 2).

Similarly, some other students also respond this way:

IMO [In My Opinion] Kaws consider the environment is important. It's showed by living in the wood. They should do Ta-Na-

E-Ka in the woods without facility they bring, living on insect and without food, (datum 13). Kaws perceive/ consider the environment in their life with take care the forest because the Ta-Na-E-Ka is held in forest, (datum 6).

For them (the Kaws) environment is (considered) important for life. They do Ta-Na-E-Ka in woods. They got that living in the environment has many things that people need for it but environment also can be a hard thing/ wilderness. Environment is a way for them can survive by endurance, (datum 7).

Interestingly, the similar answers above are given by seven different students. This means that they similarly notice that the Kaws really consider the environment, particularly the woods. It is because Ta-Na-E-Ka is conducted in the woods; thus, the students shape their responses that the Kaws really consider their relationship with nature. In the woods the Kaws have to rely on themselves to take part in Ta-Na-E-Ka; the woods/ the forest is the source of their life during the Ta-Na-E-Ka. Meanwhile, ecocriticism has proposed that place/ setting is viewed as an important point; ecocriticism highly values the 'literary sense of place' not as setting but as an essential expression of bonding with or alienation from a specific natural context. Then, the students are able to recognize this within Whitebird's *Ta-Na-E-Ka*. In short, the woods/ the forest is considered as the connector of the relationship of the Kaws as human beings with nature, and some of the students can successfully recognize this.

There are some other answers that are worth noting as the students are able to apply the concept of ecocriticism in their answers and to show their ecological awareness.

I think they very bear mutual respect about woods. They also have a relationship with the environment cause environment gives everything they need to staying alive, (datum 19).

Kaws consider the environment in their life like a battle field. They think the environment is so hard and only the strongest and the smartest one can survive, (datum 21).



The quotations above show deeper responses of two students commenting on how the Kaws consider the environment. The first reflects the mutual relationship between human beings and the environment. The student is able to see its depiction within Whitebird's *Ta-Na-E-Ka*. Here, he argues that the Kaws respect the environment since it is the woods that give the source of life for the Kaws. In the next quotation above (datum 21), the student views that the Kaws have placed the environment as a battle field meaning that the woods is the 'setting' for competing to be the strongest and the smartest. To this extent, the students are able to capture the depiction of how nature/ the environment affects the people, and the people affect nature and its consequences either being the strongest and the smartest. This is in line with what has been proposed by Barry (2002) in his view about the position of ecocriticism. Therefore, based on the answers gained from the students above, they show that they are able to capture the celebration of nature, environment and their relationship with human beings depicted in the short story. They can sense and illustrate that the Kaws consider the environment as an important and influential part of their life namely as the place to conduct *Ta-Na-E-Ka* and as a place of the life sources.

Ensuring that the students really have such ecological awareness, they were asked to mention the parts of the story which shows the depiction of nature, the relationship among nature, the environment and the Kaws. This is taken as the supporting data that the students can really play their parts as ecocritics of Whitebird's *Ta-Na-E-Ka*, that is, by showing their responses and relating their answers to the story. The following are extracts from the short story quoted by most of the students:

... "To survive, we must endure. When I was a boy," he went on, "*Ta-Na-E-Ka* was harder than it is now. We were painted white with the juice of a sacred herb and were sent naked into the wilderness without even a knife, (Whitebird in Goodman, 2003:127)

During that time we had to stay alive—trapping food, eating insect and roots and berries, and watching out our enemies. And we did have enemies—the white soldiers and the Omaha warriors, who were always trying to capture Kaw boys and girls undergoing their endurance test. It was an exciting time.", (Whitebird in Goodman, 2003:127)

The sun was shining and it was warm, but my bare feet began to hurt immediately. I spied one of the berry bushes Grandfather had told us about. "You are lucky," he had said. "The berries are ripe in the spring, and they are delicious and nourishing." They were orange and fat and I popped one into my mouth, (Whitebird in Goodman, 2003:129)

Surprisingly, the extracts that the students have quoted above have really supported their arguments that the Kaws have really considered the environment in their life because *Ta-Na-E-Ka* is conducted in the woods and because the environment—the woods—have provided the food, the source of their life. This shows that the students involved in the study have performed their analysis of ecocriticism, and at the same time, they are able to show their awareness of the ecological issues expressed by the short story.

The next part is actually to strengthen the first part where the students have shared their opinions about the Kaws' consideration and recognition of nature and the environment. The answers to question 4 above are very satisfying since all of the students think that the Kaws really have a close relationship with nature and the environment. The following are some quotations describing the students' opinions that the Kaws have really a close relationship with the environment/ nature.

Yes, I think Kaws have close relationship with the environment or the woods. Because the woods gave food for us. And the nature selected us for surviving in the woods. Kaws used the wood/ the nature for ceremony of *Ta-Na-E-Ka*. It's useful for how could the kids survive in the woods. We can learn anything from the woods, (datum 3).

I think Kaw have close relationship with the environment because they make ceremony in

the woods. They are kind find anything food in the woods. The environment, especially the woods, gives them food that can be to survive, (datum 5).

Yes because they still do the Ta-Na-E-Ka which took place in the woods. It means they are very close with the environment; they have to stay side by side with the nature; they want their next generation appreciate their environment and not to destroy their environment, (datum 21).

Based on the quotations above, it can be seen that the students think the Kaws have a close relationship with nature and the environment; in this case, the most commonly cited reason is that Ta-Na-E-Ka is conducted in the forest/ the woods. Besides, some reasons shown above can also support the fact that the students can realize the relationship between the people and their environment where the Kaw people have to 'cooperate' with nature to stay alive. The students' arguments really show that they are fully aware that nature affects people and people affect nature, just like what has been proposed by ecocriticism. Thus, they are also aware that the short story has taught them ecological issues, and they can also show their ecological awareness by citing relevant parts of the short story.

Furthermore, the quotations below also show the students' understanding that the Kaws have a close relationship with the environment because their tradition is conducted in the woods, i.e., in nature.

After reading *Ta-Na-E-Ka*, I think Kaws have close relationship with the environment because they use wood for their place for the ceremony of Ta-Na-E-Ka, (datum 6).

Yes, I think Kaws are close with the environment because in fact they do the Ta-Na-E-Ka in the woods, in the woods, they must survive and look for goods by themselves, (datum 22).

I think Kaws have close relationship with the environment because the ceremony of Ta-Na-E-Ka is in the woods. In the woods, you will get a new experience, bravery, and independent surviving, (datum 19).

I think they have close relationship with the environment because they still have to denote a culture and still have to keep heritage, (datum 11).

In short, it can be concluded that the students can capture the celebration of the environment. They have managed to see that the Kaws' life depends on the environment, the Kaws can also influence the environment, and all of these are because Ta-Na-E-Ka, one important ceremony in the Kaws, is done in the woods, a place that is representing the environment. Thus, the students can show their understanding of the short story from the viewpoint of ecocriticism.

Finally, the last part discussing the students' ecocriticism on Mary Whitebird's *Ta-Na-E-Ka* explores what the students have learnt about the environment depicted in the short story. Here are some of the students' answers to the question whether they have learnt anything about the environment depicted in the short story they have read.

Yes, I learn about environment from this literature and the environment teaches the Kaws, too., (datum 9).

I learn about the environment from literature and we had to appreciate our heritage/ custom, (datum 3).

Yes sure, Ta-Na-E-Ka can tell us the relationship between earth and people who live there. This is a good literature. Reading this literature can give us how to live, (datum 17).

Here, the students have acknowledged that they have learnt about the environment after reading the short story. They learn about the environment as a place that people should appreciate as it is shown by how the Kaw people treat and depend themselves on the environment when they are doing the Ta-Na-E-Ka ceremony. There is also a mutual relationship that people and the environment are related to each other, and the students have learnt about this after reading the short story. This shows that they are able to show their awareness of the ecological

problems faced by the Kaws depicted in the story, and their ecological awareness is reflected in their comments above such as the suggestion to appreciate nature, and to respect it.

Furthermore, some other interesting comments are also given by the students as shown below:

I learn something about environment after reading *Ta-Na-E-Ka*. People should be close with environment because it gives us many things like foods, water, and others. Actually we can't live without nature so we should treat the world well, by the nature we can survive, (datum 13).

I learn something by reading *Ta-Na-E-Ka* about environment. People have to be close with environment because it has given is many things. We can get food by environment and environment also helps us to survive. We must be able to save ourselves by the wilderness of environment. And, I learn when we are getting adult we have to prepare ourselves. Environment is very important for people. It can give many things that people are needed. Environment also can train people to know how hard this life, (datum 7).

The comments above not only strengthen the fact that the students have learnt how to treat and respect the environment through the short story, but also remind other people to treat the environment wisely. This is another reflection of the students' ecological awareness. Through their opinions above, the students realize how the environment has affected people, and vice versa. These data indicate that Whitebird's *Ta-Na-E-Ka*, along with its ecological values and the depiction of the celebration of nature, has been very influential on the students to learn about heritage, culture, and, most importantly, nature mainly to raise their ecological awareness.

## CONCLUSION

Mary Whitebird's *Ta-Na-E-Ka* has been shown to contain ecocentric values and the students involved in this study can successfully

understand and even capture the relationship between human beings and nature depicted in the short story. Thus far, this paper has attempted to show that this type of short stories is suitable to be used as teaching material to vocalize the spirit of better ecological understanding, and teach students to respect and appreciate the environment, and finally it can give more space for other teachers and lecturers to employ literary works as authentic teaching material, especially for the ecological issues. Also, the students can be ecocritics of the text namely by showing their ecological awareness through their answers.

To sum up, as part of the teaching and learning process, the students are required to understand the short story that they are studying; thus, it can be said that the text can be effectively employed as teaching material. Here, the 28 students involved in the study have managed to show that they have fully understood the story by describing the theme, the character and the characterization found in Whitebird's *Ta-Na-E-Ka*. The second purpose of the study is positioning the students as ecocritics of Whitebird's *Ta-Na-E-Ka*; those students have been able to successfully show their sensibility, and their awareness to value the ecological issues depicted in the short story. The students capture the ecological issues by mentioning the relationship of the Kaws with the environment; they learn how to treat and respect the environment as they have learnt how the Kaws treat, respect and depend themselves on nature, the environment, that is, the woods as the place to conduct *Ta-Na-E-Ka*. At this stage, it is worth emphasizing that these students have shown their ability to be critics of literature, namely, by applying ecocriticism. This ecocriticism class is worth trying as a meaningful way to teach students about issues of nature, environment and their relationship with people as it has been shown by the story of *Ta-Na-E-Ka*, and also it is supported by the students' acknowledgment of learning about nature after they read the short story.

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