



Title	How to Conduct a Class in Teaching Poetry
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Abstract

This paper is carried out to present a sample lesson plan for conducting a class to teach a poem from a literary approach as it is impossible to appreciate what the poet really intends to convey in the text without being able to identify and interpret the literary devices used in the text (poem). In this paper a poem prescribed for second year English specialization, "Invictus" by William Ernest Henley, is chosen for sample lesson plan focusing on the appreciation of the theme. To comprehend what the poet really wants the readers to feel, some definitions on the poetry, some of the most commonly used literary devices and sound devices are first introduced, then the theme of the selected poem is studied line by line, stanza by stanza, using the above mentioned knowledge of literary devices, and at last the main theme of the whole poem is generalized. As this paper is intended for English language teaching through literature, pre-reading activities, while reading activities and post-reading activities are provided.

1.Introduction

As the world becomes a global village, most of the countries in the world nowadays connect each other by any means in any fields of economics, politics, education, religion and so on. Evidently, there needs a common tool to communicate among them and English language undoubtedly takes a major role in international communication for many countries were once colonized by the English empire and the natives of those countries were more or less familiar with English. As in most other countries, English is taught in schools, colleges and universities in our country due to its utility. Out of many different lessons on English, the university students specializing in English have to learn English literature through the selected pieces of art work like poems, short stories, novels and dramas. The purpose of teaching these literary works is to make the students keep in touch with English language through literature so as they can apply what they learn in the classrooms in their daily life. Therefore it is clear that the teachers need to teach the students to know each and every words used in the text and to generally comprehend what the author wants to convey, and to make them use English language to express themselves. As the aim of this paper is to present a sample lesson plan on how to conduct a class in teaching poetry, it is objected to introduce different definitions of poetry by some famous poets in history, some commonly-used poetical devices and sound devices followed by pre-reading activities, while-reading activities and post-reading activities of the sample teaching plan for a poem selected from prescribed ones for second year English specialization class "Invictus" by William Ernest Henley. The reason for choosing this poem is due to its expressive words and many interpretations. Then the paper is concluded together with a suggestion.

2.Some definitions on the poetry

As the knowledge on the nature of poetry enables the reader understand what the poet mentions in his or her poem, some definitions on the poetry by some famous poets are introduced to the students in preliminary phase. Most common ones are as follows:

All good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility.

William Wordsworth

Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moment of the happiest and best time.

P.B.Shelley

Poetry is the universal language which the heart holds with nature and itself.

William Hazlitt

Poetry is a way of taking life by the throat.

Robert Frost

Poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by singularity – it should strike the reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost as remembrance.

John Keats

Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, by an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.

T.S Eliot

3. Some Commonly-used Poetical Devices

As Edgar Allen Poe suggested “Poetry should be brief, passionate and intense”, poets choose the best words and put them in best order because poets do not have much time and space as novelists and poems are mainly intended to be cited. So to build up musicality and to carry his meanings outside the realm of pure reality, poets usually make use of symbolic expressions known as figures of speech or poetical devices. Most commonly used devices are simile, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, personification, hyperbole and apostrophe. In addition, poets sometimes use sound devices like alliteration, onomatopoeia and rhymes to produce the melody or to quicken the pace of the poem.

As this paper on teaching a poem focusing only on the theme, poetical devices as figurative language and sound devices introduced to the students are mentioned.

3.1 Figurative language

Figurative language is a language used in such a way as to force words out of their literal meanings by emphasizing their connotations to bring new insight and feeling to the subject. Examples include hyperbole or exaggeration, understatement, simile and metaphor, synecdoche and metonymy.

Apostrophe – A figure of speech in which a person not present, the dead person or the personified object are directly addressed.

Example: Roll on, thou deep and blue ocean – Roll!

Hyperbole – A figure of speech involving exaggeration or an overstatement for the sake of emphasis.

Example: Till all the sea dry.

Metaphor - A comparison between essentially unlike things without an explicitly comparative word such as *like* or *as*.

Example : "My love is a red, red rose,"

Metonymy -A figure of speech in which a closely related term is substituted for an object or idea or the use of a closely related idea for the idea itself.

Example: "We have always remained loyal to the crown."

Oxymoron - Two words placed close together which are contradictory, yet have truth in them.

Example: His honour rooted in dishonoured stood.

Personification - A statement in which animate or living qualities are given to an animal, object or idea.

Example: "The yellow leaves flaunted their color gaily in the breeze."

Simile -A figure of speech involving a comparison between unlike things using *like*, *as*, *than* or *resembles* or *as though*.

Example: "My love is like a red, red rose."

Synecdoche- A figure of speech in which a part is substituted for the whole.

Example: "Lend me a hand."

3.2 Sound devices

Alliteration - The repetition of the same letter or consonant sounds, especially at the beginning of closely connected words.

Example: "Fetched fresh, as I suppose, off some sweet wood." Hopkins, "In the Valley of the Elwy."

Assonance- The repetition of similar vowel sounds in a sentence or a line of poetry or prose.

Example: "I rose and told him of my woe."

Onomatopoeia - The use of words to imitate the sounds they describe. Words such as *buzz* and *crack* are onomatopoeic. Most often, however, onomatopoeia refers to words and groups of words, which attempts to capture the sound of a swarm of bees buzzing.

Example: buzz, bang, splash.

4. The Selected Text

Invictus

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

William Ernest Henley

5. Procures of the Lesson Plan

Concerning with the procedure of the lesson plan, pre-reading activities, while –reading activities and post-reading activities for teaching a poem are presented together with some questions and explanations on the selected poem.

Firstly, the title of the poem is introduced and focused by giving a bit of information on the meaning of the word *Invictus* as “unconquerable” to the students because it has a great contribution to the interpretation of the poem. From this prior information the students will surely assume that the poem has something to do with being unconquerable or invincible.

5.1 Pre-reading Activities

The introduction to the topic is followed by pre-reading activities as the pre-reading activities can arouse the students' interest in the subject matter of the poem. By attempting to answer the leading questions mentioned below, the students will be able to guess what the poem is about..

1. Can you mention something unconquerable in life?
2. Do you know what the colour 'black' usually refers to?
3. What meaning do you think the word "night" can convey?
4. What word can you use in the place of "pit"?
5. Can you guess how deep a pit which is long from pole to pole?
6. Why do you think the poet uses the word 'clutch' in the second stanza?
7. How do you understand the word "Bludgeoning"?
8. When do you usually see a person's wrath?
9. What do you think the phrase "this place of wrath and tears" refer to?
10. What does the phrase "the horror of the shade" refer to?
11. What word can you use instead of "loom"?
12. What is the meaning of *chance*?
13. "What's the most common dictionary definition of the word "strait"?"
14. The word *charged* has several meanings. What does the author intend it to mean?
15. Do you believe that you are the master of your fate?
16. Do you think that your genes, your environment, and other factors place your fate outside of your control?

It is sure that the students' interest can be aroused by these questions. At this stage the students should be let discuss among themselves in English so that they can involve the process of language practice and can improve their thinking skills.

5.2 While-reading Activities

Firstly the students are asked to read the poem again and again so that they can find the literal meaning of the poem because the literal meaning is the most straightforward version of the poem and all good poems are based on words that carry literal meanings but do not refer to any poetic devices. Concerning with the topic of the selected poem, the word 'Invictus' does not have any literal meaning in English as it is a Latin word, which means 'unconquerable'. So the

sensible and true meaning of the poem "Invictus" lies between the lines. And so, to find the hidden information that lies between the lines, it is required to interpret the meaning of the words together. For example, the phrases like 'the night that covers me', 'the pit from pole to pole', 'the fell clutch of circumstance', 'the bludgeonings of chance', 'place of wrath and tears', 'the horror of the shade', 'the menace of the years'.

Secondly the teacher asks the students to read the poem again to find the connotative meaning, the emotions and feelings that a word creates, of the poem by taking several keywords or phrases from the poem and consider the kinds of connotations they carry. For example, take the word 'night' in the first line. The dictionary would define 'night' as 'the period of darkness between sunset and sunrise'. But the word 'night' probably creates emotions and feelings of negative effect in the readers' mind: it paints a picture of danger, wickedness, cruelty, difficulty and hardship etc. So in the poem, the connotation of 'night' means the pain and difficulty the poet has faced. At the same time the students have to find the symbolic meaning of the words by referring to the symbols and to record any allusions they recognize. For example, they have to think of the meaning the phrase 'the pit from pole to pole' carry or what could this stand for and why.

After some times, the teacher gives detailed explanation on every stanza. For instance, in the first two lines of the first stanza of the poem 'Invictus', the poet uses a simile: 'black as the pit from pole to pole' to liken the lightless, endless, deep desolation of the center of the earth _ 'pit' or hell _ to his darkness or the difficulty of limitless hardship by using the word 'as'. He is also implying someone's life being surrounded by the darkness of their life by the word 'Black' which is generally a metaphor for any particular hardships, persistent and sustained emotional injury, and problems of a worldly existence. Lines 3 and 4 of the selected poem: 'I thank whatever gods may be/for my unconquerable soul' corresponding to the title and introduce the poem's main theme. As a Christian, the poet strongly believes that the soul is interminable as it is the creation of God, and so he associates the theme of the unconquerable with the interminable soul.

The second stanza 'In the fell clutch of circumstance I have not winced nor cried aloud. Under the bludgeoning of chance My head is bloody, but unbowed' is also meaningful and effectively describes someone who has had a hard life. The poet personifies the circumstance by the word 'clutch' to portray the continuous hard situations and many troubles he has

encountered. He also uses a synecdoche to refer to his body and soul troubled by the unsuccessful life by the use of word 'head' which shows only a part of a body. A simple verb 'unbowed', which directly carries the meaning of 'never given up pushing through the difficulties', is found too. By the knowledge of the meaning of the word 'Bludgeoning' as 'beating or forcing down' the readers can easily catch what the poet is implying _ someone has been beaten down, but they are still capable and full of endurance to conquer the troubles of the life ahead of them.

In The third stanza ' this place of wrath and tears' is used as a metaphor to compare the unpleasant image between the life full of greed, sorrow, anger with the place of wrath and tears without comparative words such as *like* or *as*. At this point again, the poet uses the phrase 'Horror of the shade' to indicate the gloomy unsecure situation of the past through the use of metonymy as everyone can easily have bone- chilled sense of obscurity, the unknown or ghost. The lines 'And yet the menace of the years Finds, and shall find, me unafraid' explain how the poet perceives the fact that there will be circumstances in the future that he cannot prevent from happening and that the past troubled years has prepared him for the future ones. "The menace of the years" is the last breath of a person, the end of which would mark the beginning of the journey to the shade beyond, the unknown. The approaching years will surely find the person who is unafraid and ready to overcome the hardships.

'It matters not how strait the gate, How charged with punishments the scroll' are the first two lines of the last stanza. These lines are associated with Christian ideas and images as Christians believe that they all will be before God in Heaven to accept His judgment on doomsday. By this lines the poet mentions that it is not important how much narrow the gate to the Heaven is or what punishments one may bear from life and the afterlife as long as one is confidently in control. It is not a contradiction of the straight and narrow path, but rather an acceptance of its challenge. 'Scroll' again indirectly refers to heavenly imagery.

The last and famous line 'I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul' in the last stanza is the poem's final affirmation of spiritual fortitude as we are the decision-makers in our lifetimes, we are the sole authorities over ourselves because these words can easily be understood that a person is the controller of their own life as a captain is in charge of and responsible for a vessel. In these lines the reader can see the repetition of the same idea in different phrases as in 'master' and 'captain', and 'the fate and the soul'.

Finally the students are asked to stop reading and question themselves, “What is the author trying to say?” What is his goal for this poem? What kind of a reaction is he trying to get out of readers? Why?” and to try to identify the author’s purpose for writing to catch the theme of the poem. So it can be generally said that the poem is about never losing hope even if things are bad and the theme of this poem is vividly identified that although life is a struggle and is not absolute, with the authority that a person has over his own life, he can proceed on the road of his choice as only he is the master of his fate, and the captain of his soul or, the will to survive in the face of a severe test.

5.3 Post-reading Activities

Follow-up questions and post-reading activities can reinforce the preceding works and further interpretation of the poem. Post-reading activities normally support the students’ creative writing skills and speaking skills. So the following exercises are suggested.

1. Translate the poem into conversational English
2. How would you tell the poem’s story to a friend?
3. Is “Invictus” good or bad? Give reasons.

6. Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction “the purpose of teaching literary works is to teach the student English language through literature”, the students can be trained to apply English effectively and efficiently by making them acquire appropriate use of language through learning a poem. At the same time the teachers themselves can improve their language proficiency and their ELT skills by teaching a piece of literature work. Therefore it is suggested that the teachers should choose a specific piece of prescribed text, make thorough preparation to teach it to the students and perform mini teaching before the colleagues prior to the classroom teaching.

