

Methods and Techniques for Teaching Poetry at the Undergraduate Level

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Abstract

Poetry is regarded as the noble thoughts and noble emotions caught in noble language. Its main importance in the class room is that it brings the students into contact with the human nature and also with the feelings and aspirations of great souls. It enriches their emotional life and develops the aesthetic sense among them. Students get pleasure through rhythm and rhyme of poetry. Students are very fond of poetry due to its musical sounds and rhymes. Coleridge defines poetry as “The best words in the best orders”.

Keywords: Poetry, Nature, Emotions, Music and Rhymes.

Introduction

A poem is a work of art and display of the craftsmanship of the poet in using words to give expression to his emotions and feelings and experiences. The language that poetry uses is not the same that we normally use in day –to –day communication. Poetry is recreating language. The poet deliberately uses words in a way that ordinary speakers of the language cannot. The teaching of a poem is an art. The teacher of English should try to acquire this. While teaching a poem the teacher should become one with the feelings of the poet. He should be able to create proper atmosphere for the feelings of the poets. For example, the teacher wants to teach the poem Daffodils. He should make a vivid description of Daffodils in such a way that the students should think as if Daffodils are before them.

Poetry is literary genre that explores universal themes and express life experiences, observations, and emotions. Poetry often employs non –standard sentence structures, vocabulary, rhyme, rhythm, and tone. It deviates from conventional language norms, manipulating syntax, creating unique vocabulary, and freely mixing registers. Poetic language enhances students’ awareness of language’s flexibility and develops their interpretive and creative abilities. There are different types of poetry with different poetic forms and themes.

Epic

A long narrative poem with a serious subject, elevated style, and heroic or divine central figure. Examples include Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

Lyric

A narrative poem, often song –like, that expresses a single character's thoughts or feelings. Examples include Shelley's "To a Skylark" and Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress"

Ballad

A poem that narrates a traditional story, often with a song –like quality. Ballads can be classified as folk ballads, broadside ballads, or literary ballads.

Ode

A long lyrical poem with an elevated style and a specific stanza structure, often written in praise of a person or subject.

Elegy

A poem that laments some one's death, expressing mourning or sorrow, such as "Tears, Idle Tears" and Ghimire's 'Gauri'.

Sonnet

A fourteen-line, typically in iambic pentameter, with a specific rhyming scheme. Sonnets often consists of an octave (first eight lines) and a sestet (first six lines). Different Types of sonnets include Petrarch an sonnets and Shakespearean sonnets.

No uniform method can be laid down for teaching of poetry. Each poem has to be treated individually .However a good lesson plan is anticipatory teaching .The teacher visualizes the class room activities in advance. By the power of his imagination he foresees the problems that he may have to face in the class. He prepares in advance for them. He prepares a lesson plan and tries to follow certain essential methods and techniques.

Methods and Techniques for teaching poetry

First the teacher gives a brief and pointed introduction to the poem.Un necessary details about the poet's life are not necessary at the stage, for them to get the impact of the poem. A good introduction is like an appetizer before a big meal.

After a brief introduction the teacher reads the poem aloud, and the students listen with their books shut. Students love to listen to poetry. We in India have had a long tradition of listening to songs and epics (long heroic stories) rendered through poetry. The skill of listening to music and poetry is inborn in us.

The teacher reads the poem first for its sound and rhythm, not its meaning. The music, the alliterations and assonances, rhyme and rhythm appeal to the students. And they get the total effect of the poem instantly. They pass over minor points which are not clear at the first reading. They will be able to fill in the details into the total structure of the poem later. The enthusiasm of the teacher can be passed on to the students more easily through a good reading than the printed page can. A good teacher should be familiar with the rhythm, stress, intonation, pitch and pattern of English. Students must feel the music that words carry with them.

The teacher needs to cultivate the style of poetry reading. If needed the teacher can also take the aid of recorded audio cassettes in the class room. A poem should be read in the manner that it appeals to the learners.

The objective of the first reading with the text book closed is to let the students obtain a first impression of the poem.

The teacher reads the poem again with the students looking into their books. Students get more of the central idea from this reading. They get an experience of the poem. Teacher then asks them a few global questions, followed by intelligent local questions which help them to reflect on the nature and quality of the experience. The poet weaves several layers of meaning into a poem. Students understand these meanings at their own level. Students should be allowed to discover it themselves gradually.

Teacher should not miss the opportunity of involving his students in dramatizing the poem. It is very important that different activities-individual, pair or group-are designed to involve learners in a poem's theme.

Teacher tells something about the poem in simple English. He may show a picture or a chart or a diagram for this purpose. Thus he creates proper atmosphere for them. Difficult words contained in the poem are taken up and dealt with the active participation of the learners. In doing

so, the teacher takes up the words and their meanings in simple English. The teacher focuses on the beauty of the poem, discusses the imagery and figures of speeches,(metaphor, Simile, personification hyperbole, etc.) and the poet's style.

Teacher translates or paraphrases the poem in to simple prose to help students understanding the meaning. The teacher plays a major role at the stage and allows the students to speak up and play an articulate role in going to the heart of the poem. Too much explanation at this stage will be out of the place.

Teacher gives model recitation of the poem. Gestures and actions are performed by the teacher wherever possible. A few students of the class are asked to read the poem one by one .Mistakes if any are corrected with the help of other students of the class .Teacher should help them to recite it wit ,caring effect about the pronunciation ,intonation ,rise and fall of the voice. This will enable them to feel the music and beauty of its language.

The teacher asks questions which will enable them to appreciate the poem. The main purpose of the questions is to know if the meaning of the poem is clear to students and to make certain ideas more clear. The questions should be simple and should not break the continuity of the poem. Their number depends upon the length and ideas of the poem.

Ten there is final reading by the teacher followed by the students reading it again individually and in chorus. It helps them in overcoming shyness. Later on they recite it independently. It also heightens aural effect which is necessary for appreciation .Besides it helps in emotional release, development of eloquence and fluency.

By the end of the class students understand the poem in terms of its melody, images and meanings. The less a poem is taught the better. The more number of times a poem is read, the higher will be sense of pleasure and enjoyment. Enjoyment is essence of teaching poetry. The teacher too should enjoy the poem along with the students.

Lastly the students are asked to do some assignments at home. It may be learning of the poem by heart or writing the summary of the poem in simple English.

The aim of the teaching poetry basically to enable learners to understand and appreciate it as a piece of art. Nobody can enjoy a poem unless he understands it. Poetry is for pleasure. To Robert frost "poetry begins in delight and ends in wisdom". It is clear that we read poetry in order

to get some pleasure and enjoy the beauty of the language. We not only appreciate the ideas and thoughts but also the way in which the thoughts and ideas have been presented.

The main aim of teaching poetry to develop the power of appreciation of beauty, rhyme and style of the poem. The specific aims of teaching poetry differ from poem to poem. They depend largely on feelings, scene situation and thought depicted in the poem. Each poem brings a specific and exclusive message from the poet to communicate the student.

Poetry educates our emotions and increases our power of imagination. We can compare prose to walking, moving from one place to another on the surface of the earth, getting the world's daily work done, poetry may be compared then to dancing, rising above the surface of earth, perceiving its relations, getting a fuller view of its reality.

Poetry has cathartic value because it helps in expression and training of emotions. According to Billows, "there seems to be a special value in poetry in a foreign language in opening up of the fantasy and giving release to inhibited and excessive introverted types.

Poetry is more memorable than prose because of its arrangement of rhyme and rhythm. It has been rightly defined as "memorable speech". The rhythm of poetry helps the learner to acquire a natural speech rhythm. This is specially so-at the early stage when simple rhymes are used for the practice of rhythm and pronunciation. Poetry imparts pleasure to the students. It gladdens the heart of man. It lays the foundation for the appreciation of the beauty of language, for poetry is beauty-beauty of form, beauty of thought, mood or feeling. Poetry introduces variety in the English course which is a good antidote against boredom. One of the advantages of reciting poetry with proper stress and rhythm is to impart training in speech and pronunciation to the pupils. The reading of poetry helps us to acquire the natural rhythm of English Speech.

In teaching poetry some hints or guidelines may be provided by the teacher. Teaching of a poem is an art. Every teacher of English cannot do justice to the teaching of a poem. Proper atmosphere needs to be created for it. The teacher who recites well, is able to succeed in teaching poetry. Tape recorder with a recorder of poems can surely help the teacher. Practice in poem recitation is needed on the part of English teachers.

Thus, giving thought to pros and cons of teaching poetry. I come to the conclusion in favour of teaching poetry. It is true that the objectives and learning English in India are utilitarian. It is also true that the language and contents of English poetry are unusual, yet there is not



justification for excluding poetry from the school English course. There is immense value of teaching poetry in English language course at the secondary school level. It tends to develop the emotional, imaginative and aesthetic sides of students personality.

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