

Teaching Poetry

University of Djelfa

Level: Master 1

Department of Foreign Languages

Lecturer: Dr. Ahmed Bouchemal

Module: Teaching Literary Texts

Lecture 04: Teaching Poetry

Introduction:

Reading poetry is often seen as a difficult task for students. The task of the teacher becomes twofold as he should know ways to introduce such a genre to students and guide students with the use of suitable tasks to understand, appreciate and approach the meaning of poetry with its distinctive linguistic and thematic features. This lecture aims to introduce teachers to the realm of teaching poetry to students. It explores how poetry is linguistically distinctive and the many benefits students can have as they are introduced to such a genre. This would help students accustom themselves to poetry and have a good knowledge about certain problems they may encounter when reading poetry.

What is distinctive about poetry?

Leech (1988) describes poetry as “deviating from the norms of language”. **“Discuss”**

According to the quote above, one can distinguish these features about the language of poetry:

- 1- Poetry reorganizes syntax.
- 2- Poetry invents its own vocabulary.
- 3- Poetry freely mixes registers.
- 4- Poetry creates its own punctuation.
- 5- Poetry generates vivid new metaphors.
- 6- Poetry patterns sounds and orders rhythms.

Why use poetry with the language learner?

Teaching Poetry

- 1- Though poetry breaks the rules of language, it still communicates with us in a fresh and original way.
- 2- A more focus on casual conversations of native speakers.
- 3- Contrast unusual syntax with more commonly accepted ones –Reinforcement of the norms of language-
- 4- Reinforcing lexical or grammatical areas.
- 5- Confident interpretations of the poem – literal meaning and deeper meaning-

Exploring unusual language features

Due to the distinctiveness of the language of poetry, tasks and activities differ

- 1- We might begin by analyzing what is linguistically unusual about a poem then devise activities.
- 2- Understand the historical and cultural background.

Helping Students with Figurative Meanings

Here the task of the teacher is to understand the multiple ambiguities of metaphorical language.

- 1- The problem with metaphors:
 - It may not be clear that the metaphor is being used
 - Difficulty to unravel the connection between dissimilar objects or concepts.
 - Interpreting metaphors drawing on their own individual associations.

Practical Tasks and Activities:

- Sentence completion.
- Matching words to definitions.

Teaching Poetry

- Predictive writing.
- Ordering sentences in the correct sequence.
- Writing your own poem.
- Matching words to pictures.
- Checking word meaning in a dictionary.
- Organizing words according to lexical relationships.

Using Poetry to develop oral skills:

Though the linguistic features of poetry are important, the above activities tend to stress what the eye sees when a poem is read and ignores the rich patterns of sounds.

Useful Activities:

1- Pre-reading activities

- Predict the theme out of the title
- Discuss or describes pictures
- What would my students do if they were in a similar situation?
- Read or listen to a text /historical and cultural background
- The teacher preaches any important words, phrases or grammatical connections that appear in the poem.

2- While- Reading Activities

- Give a jumbled version of the poem
- Answer comprehension questions
- Read one verse and predict what is coming next

3- Post-Reading Activities

- Give underlying meanings of the poem, which ones are true or false

Teaching Poetry

- Give brief interpretations possibly from critics, which one is appropriate
- Filming the poem: what visual image they would provide
- Students practise reading the poem aloud / Choral reading