

Integration of Poetry with Vocabulary Teaching

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Abstract: Having been ignored for several decades, literature made a welcome comeback to language teaching with the spread of communicative language teaching. Today it is widely agreed by second language teaching theoreticians and practitioners that literature is an indispensable source for language teaching as it introduces the best examples of language use, provides authentic materials for all levels of learners, familiarizes learners with the culture of the language they are learning, and enhances motivation by involving them personally and appealing to their emotions. This paper aims to explore whether it is possible to generate activities to teach vocabulary by using poems.

Keywords: Using literature, language teaching, poetry, various activity types.

Having been neglected for several decades, literature has made a welcome comeback to language teaching since the spread of communicative language teaching. Today it is widely agreed by second language teaching theoreticians and practitioners that literature is an indispensable source for language teaching as it introduces the best and bountiful examples of language use of great variety, provides authentic materials for all levels of learners, familiarizes learners with the culture of the language they are learning, enhances motivation by involving them personally and appealing to their emotions, and improves learners' creative, interpretive and critical reading abilities (Collie and Slater, 1987; Lazar, 1993; Belcher and Hirvela, 2000; Parkinson and Thomas, 2001; Floris, 2004; Hall, 2005; Duff and Maley, 2007; Carter, 2007; Paran, 2006; Paran, 2008).

In most of the studies and articles related to the use of literature in language teaching, the role of literature use in improving grammar and language skills (Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening) is highlighted whereas conscious practice on vocabulary improvement is considered unnecessary as it is thought to be a natural result of reading literature (Krashen; 1989; Akyel & Yalçın, 1990; Hadaway, Vardell and Young, 2001b; Hall 2003; Flora Debra Floris, 2004; Hadaway 2001a; Gina DeBlase, 2005; Stacey Weber Feve, 2009). However, there are some attempts to use poetry in vocabulary teaching (Kramsch, 1985; Maley & Duff, 1989; Hanauer, 2001, Chatton, 1993; Cullinan, Scala & Schroder, 1995, Harlan Kellem, 2009).

This paper aims to explore whether it is possible to generate activities to teach vocabulary by using poems and to improve learners' literary knowledge and skills as well. To this end, various activity types will be suggested and exemplified with a poem, "Mirror" by Sylvia Plath. In the design of the activities, the principles of lexical approach, creative thinking, critical thinking and multiple intelligences are taken into consideration.

For and against Poetry in Language Classes

Poetry is the literary genre that is the least integrated into language classes (Aydinođlu: 2011). This may be because of the unjust prejudice about the language of poetry. It is usually believed that

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the language of poetry is very hard to understand and rather different from the ordinary language. "Johnson notoriously described poetry 'as violence committed on ordinary speech', at three distinct linguistic levels" (Hall, 2003:12); he names them as sound structure, choice of words, and combination of words. Mohammad Khatib puts it this way: "Poems are usually written in a form deviant from the norms of speaking or even writing and hence they make understanding them a herculean task." (Khatib, 2011: 203-204).

There are, on the other hand, opposing views. By making references to Carter (1999) and Hall (2001), Hall argues that "Literary language is surprisingly ordinary, as ordinary language is often surprisingly poetic" (Hall, 2005: 37). Harlan Kellern supports poetry stating that "Among other reasons, poetry is a source of content-rich reading material; a model of creative language in use; a way to introduce vocabulary in context; and a way to focus students' attention on English pronunciation, rhythm, and stress" (Kellern, 2009:12) David Ian Hanauer explains that "the conscious consideration of form, as manifest in second language knowledge facilitates L2 knowledge..." and "Reading poetry presents an eminently suitable task in relation to this issue, for here, meaning construction and focus on form are naturally linked." (Hanauer, 2001: 298)

The benefits of using poetry in language classes are numerous; Nancy Hadaway briefly summarizes them with references to several other writers as follows (Hadaway, 2001b:799):

- 1- The reading and rereading of poetry through read-aloud and choral reading activities promotes fluency (Gasparro & Falleta, 1994).
- 2- Poetry's brevity and short lines appear manageable and therefore not so intimidating to the reluctant or struggling reader (Christison & Bassano, 1995; Cullinan, Scala, & Schroder, 1995).
- 3- Beginning readers more easily decipher the meaning of poetry because of the rhythm, repetition, and rhyme and the fact that the accent falls on meaningful words (Christison & Bassano, 1995; Richard Amato, 1996).
- 4- Poetry serves as a brief but powerful anticipatory set for other literature as well as for the introduction of concepts and content across the curriculum (Chatton, 1993; Cullinan, Scala, & Schroder, 1995)
- 5- Poetry provides a source of brief character sketches, scenes, and stories that can prompt narratives from students (Vogel & Tilley, 1993). The variety of poetry formats... offers wonderful beginning writing opportunities (Fagin, 1991; Tompkins, 1994).

How to integrate poetry into language classes

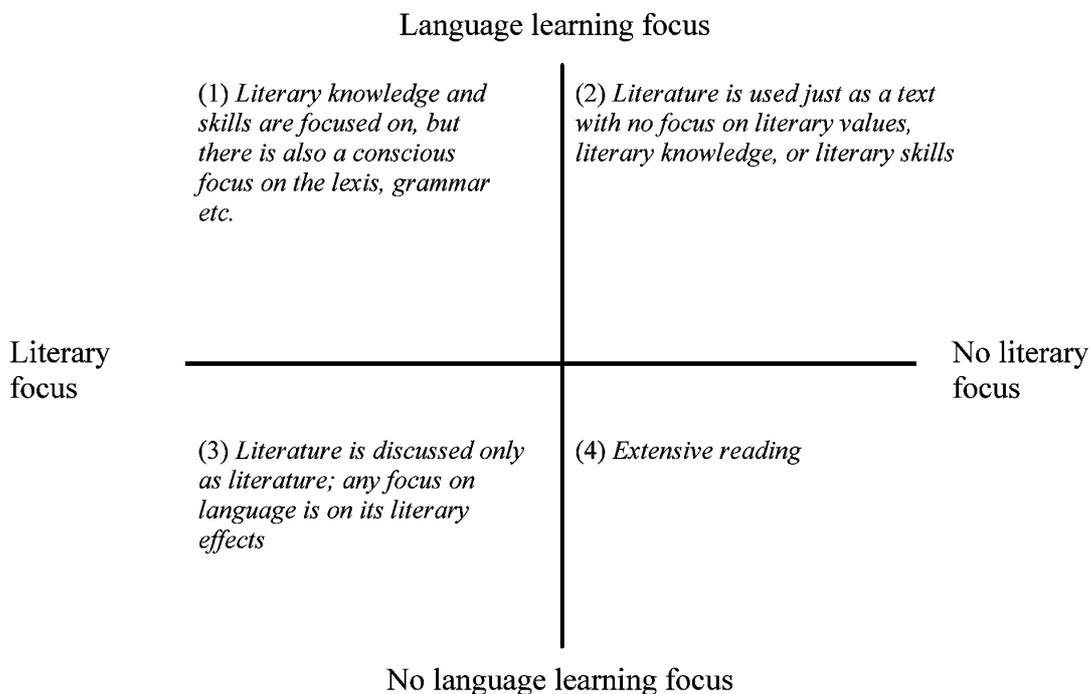
The discussion on how to integrate literature into language teaching is as important as the discussion on whether to include literature in language teaching programs. Like many others, Parkinson and Thomas roughly divide the use of literature in classes into two groups (2000:1-2):

- 1- literature as object of study
- 2- literature as topic, resource (in language improvement classes)

As language improvement is the prior objective of including literature in language courses, the second one is more appropriate to achieve this goal; that is, literature has primarily an instrumental function in language classes; it is used as a means rather than as end.

Amos Paran's gives four alternatives of using literature in language teaching (2008:467). As it is seen in the following figure, Paran presents the relationship between literature and language learning as the intersection of two axes. With the help of these two axes four quadrants are formed. Quadrants 2 and 3 coincide with Parkinson and Thomas' grouping; quadrants 1 and 4 are new. As our focus is language learning, quadrants 1 and 2 seem to be appropriate for language classes. As quadrant 2

completely ignores literary knowledge and skills, quadrant 1 seems to be the best alternative to follow in order to use literature for language improvement without being unfair to literary texts.



The Poem: Mirror by Sylvia Plath

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.
 Whatever I see, I swallow immediately.
 Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike
 I am not cruel, only truthful –
 The eye of a little god, four-cornered.
 Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall.
 It is pink, with speckles. I have looked at it so long
 I think it is a part of my heart. But it flickers.
 Faces and darkness separate us over and over.

Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me.
 Searching my reaches for what she really is.
 Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.
 I see her back, and reflect it faithfully
 She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.
 I am important to her. She comes and goes.
 Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.
 In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman
 Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.

Activities on the Poem

The activities are divided into three groups. Pre-reading activities aim to familiarize learners with the themes in the poem, to activate their prior knowledge, to help them make predictions, to arouse

their curiosity, to enhance their motivation and introduce some lexical items and grammatical structures if necessary. While-reading activities aim to help students comprehend the poem, get the meaning and practice the lexical items in the poem, and study the literary features of the poem. Post reading activities are mainly to improve learners' writing and speaking skills; it is also a production stage as it asks learners to produce by using the language items practiced in the previous stage.

Suggested Pre-reading Activities:

1. If you were to choose a metaphor to describe yourself, what would you choose? Why?
2. The title of the poem is "Mirror". Make a list of the lexical items you expect to find in the poem.
3. What are the connotations of "mirror" and "lake"?

Suggested While-reading Activities

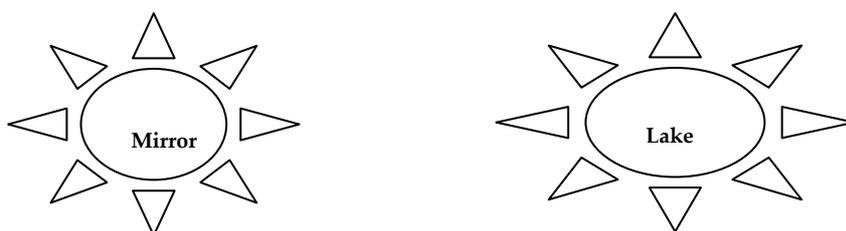


Figure1. There are 18 lines in the poem. The lines are given in jumbled order. By following the pictures put them into correct order

In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman
Faces and darkness separate us over and over.
The eye of the little god, four cornered
I see her back, and reflect it faithfully
She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.
Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.
It is pink, with speckles. I have looked at it so long
Whatever I see, I swallow immediately.
Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall.
Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me,
I think it is a part of my heart. But it flickers.
Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike
Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.
Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.

- 1- I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.
- 2-
- 3-
- 4- I'm not cruel only truthful_
- 5-
- 6-
- 7-
- 8-
- 9-
- 10-

11- Searching my reaches for what she really is.

12-

13-

14-

15- I'm important to her. She comes and goes.

16-

17-

18-

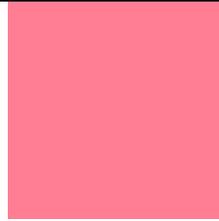


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12

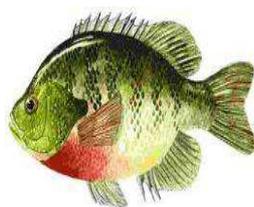


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15

16



Find metaphors appropriate for the moods given below.

Example: (happy) – I’m a bird. / I’m a sunflower.

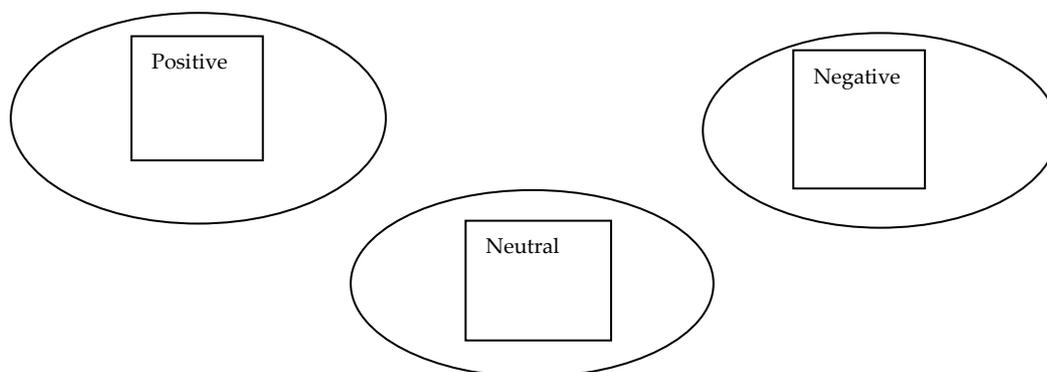
- (sad)
- (tired)
- (suspicious)
- (strong)
- (weak)
- (cunning)
- (frightening)
- (frightened)
- (hopeful)
- (excited)

Answer the following questions about the poem.

- a- Is the persona in the poem male or female? Underline the part that helps you find it.
- b- How many characters are mentioned in the poem? Who are they and what is the relationship between them.
- c- The poem is based on two metaphors. Find and explain them.

Divide the following words into three groups, and give your reasons for your grouping

Mirror, candle, the moon, lake, face, God, preconceptions, unmisted, heart, vague, truthful, liar, simple, complex, faithful, darkness, exact, cruel, love, agitation



Discuss the relationship between the following lexical items taken from the poem.

- Mirror/the eye of a little God
- Mirror/a writer
- Liars/candles, the moon
- Reward/tears and an agitation of hands

Put the following inverted sentences into standard word order.

- “Whatever I see, I swallow immediately.”
- “In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman
Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.”

Find words in the poem that rhyme with the following words

Silver	Really
Pink	Part
Meditate	Toward
Searching	Agitation.....
She	It

The following words have more than one meaning. Find them in the poem and circle the correct meaning

Meditate: a- think seriously about something.

b- think calm thoughts in order to relax

Swallow: a- a small bird with a tail with two points

b- make food, drink, etc. go down your throat to your stomach

Flicker: a- appear for a short time

b- to keep going on and off as it shines

Reflect: a- show or be a sign of

b- send the light back

c- think

Complete the following sentences.

“Whatever I see, I swallow immediately.”

a- Whatever I see in sales, I

b- Whatever I hear, I

c- Whatever I plan, I

d- Whatever I cook, I

e- Whatever I write on the board, I

Match the following words

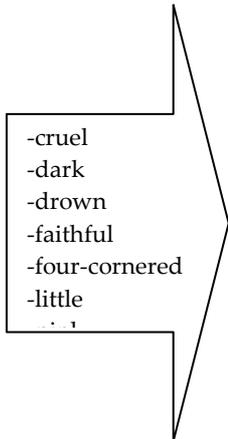
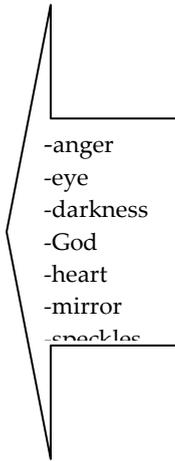
- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| ___ 1. preconceptions | a. shine on and off |
| ___ 2. speckles | b. worry and anxiety |
| ___ 3. agitation | c. glasses |
| ___ 4. meditate | d. thin fog |
| ___ 5. flicker | e. a very small mark |
| ___ 6. swallow | f. pulled |
| ___ 7. mist | g. think seriously |
| ___ 8. drown | h. secret |
| | i. die by being unable to breathe under water |
| | j. make food, drink go down your throat |
| | k. an opinion formed before enough information is available |

Fill in the blanks with suitable prepositions if necessary.

1. Doctors bend their patients to check them.
2. She turned her sister for help.
3. The wall paper was pink white speckles.
4. Her heart was unmisted love and dislike.
5. They rewarded himmoney.

6. She rose to him to touch his face.
7. Don't meditate your failures.
8. It reflects the reality.
9. It has drowned the anger him.
10. I'm importanthim.

Write as many collocations as possible from the columns below

 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -cruel -dark -drown -faithful -four-cornered -little 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.... 2.... 3.... 4.... 5.... 6.... 7.... 8.... 9.... 10. ... 11. ... 12. ... 13. ... 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -anger -eye -darkness -God -heart -mirror -speckles
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Search the poem for words that fit each box in the table

One-syllable words	Two-syllable words	Three-syllable words	Four-syllable words

Fill in the blanks as you like.

1. Each morning it is that replaces.....
2. and separate us over and over.
3. Whatever I, I immediately.
4. In me she has drowned
5. Most of the time I meditate on
6. She rewards me with
7. I have no
8. bends over
9. Whenever she is, she turns to
10. Iit just as it is.

Choose the correct word form to fit into each sentence,

1- True, truth, truthful, truthful

- a- You can't hide the for a long time.
- b- She explained her mistakes
- c- She always tried to be a person.

d- It is difficult to tell whether it is or false.

2- Mist, misty

a- The early morning cleared quickly.

b- The windows are because of the rain.

3- Faith, faithful, faithfully

a- I've lost in her honesty.

b- I recorded the dialogs

c- He remained to the king to the end.

4- Concept, conception, preconception, conceptual

a- There is a weakness in his explanation.

b- He tries hard to understand these complex mathematical

c- A visit to the village has changed all my about villagers.

d- She has no of what motherhood means.

Suggested Post-reading Activities

Act out the following

Swallow food

Search your pockets for money

Search your bag for a pen

Turn your back to your friends

Show your agitation with your hands

Show the meaning of flicker with your hand

Show your dislike

Meditate on your problems

Meditate to relax

Bend over the table

Show your love

Show your stress

Write an acrostic poem for "Mirror" and "Lake".

M

I

R

R

O

R

L

A

K

E

Imagine that you are the two women mentioned in the poem. Act out a short dialogue between them spontaneously.

Write a paragraph about the woman in the poem

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