
Student-oriented activities in literature study

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How would you present those wonderful but sometimes difficult literary texts so that your students will appreciate them? Different teachers may approach a text from different perspectives; no matter what perspective is chosen, some students will be enthusiastic, but not always as many as you would like. In this article the text-experiencing method is illustrated: with this method a genuine response to and a greater degree of integration of the substance of the text is expected. Text-experiencing activities could therefore provide the key to actively engage students with a text.

1. Introduction

In today's upper level foreign language instruction, many feel that the teaching of literature has taken a back seat to other activities, deemed more important in equipping our students with the skills they will need in 'the real world'. The most important of these other activities is the acquisition of communicative skills, and although the importance of good communicative skills cannot be denied, many educators regret the reduced time available to present literature in such a way that might kindle a keen interest, amongst our students,

in more than a smattering of literary greats in our fields.

Those of us teachers who were educated under older systems in which language education and literature study went hand-in-hand, who may even have chosen to get into the field of teaching because of the wish to continue studying literature and impart its fruits to future generations, find that our attention, to a great extent, must be focused on activities other than literature study. The result of this is that the possibility of imparting literary knowledge is severely curtailed!

This feeling of frustration experienced by many a foreign language educator in our schools is, however, not entirely justified. At the present time the emphasis of literary study in the 'Tweede Fase' is shifting away from the individualistic approaches to literature of the language departments, and focusing more on an all encompassing approach to western literature. The philosophy of such an approach is not difficult to comprehend. The students are expected to be able to make links between movements and trends in literature. The new approach makes these links and trends the more apparent to them. In addition the focus has shifted towards the students' growth as reading individuals, who are to be encouraged to take a stance regarding their place in

the scheme of things. Lofty aims, I believe.

Under the present system, the school may still opt for literature instruction remaining within the domain of (foreign) language instruction. In this case teachers have discretion in deciding what is discussed, when and how. Nevertheless the trend in education is for, at least, a partial combination of efforts of the four languages, to devise a program in which literature is presented as a body, and the languages as its cultural manifestations. Within this structure, foreign language teachers are expected to present an in depth study of one (or more) aspect of western literature as it manifested itself in the language they teach. For example: literature of the Romantic period would be discussed by the English teacher, literature of the Enlightenment by the French teacher etc. Other than this, the foreign language teacher does not teach literature. Books are read, articles, poems are discussed; but their significance is not emphasized in the way it was in the past.

Traditionally literature was seen as a reflection of literary tendencies prevalent in the period it was produced. Biographical information was studied to illustrate the driving forces of the artist in regards to his creation.

Up until recently theories focused on the text itself were employed to present literature to upper level students. These theories proposed step-by-step analysis of a text. Underlying these theories is the assumption that every text contains a theme, and the student must use his intuitive and interpretive skills to identify it. Three basic steps, as this is sometimes called, characterize the text-centered approach: analysis, interpretation, and evaluation.

This approach to literature instruction has carried on well into the last decade; indeed there are many educators who still employ it. In point of fact the text-focused as well as the historical-biographical approaches to literature are still used to a certain extent.

Nevertheless they have been challenged and gradually replaced in many educational sources by text-experiencing methods (Reader Response and Aesthetic Response) in which the reader, no longer the text, is the focal point of literature study.

The assumption in the text-experiencing methods is that a transaction arises between reader and text and in this the meaning of the text is to be sought. Reader Response criticism emphasizes the interdependence of text and reader in the interpretation of texts. No longer are teachers expected to provide 'correct readings' of texts, but they are to concentrate their efforts on devising activities to encourage bringing about this transaction. So influential have been these theories on literature teaching that they have made their way into the *eindtermen* of the 'Tweede Fase': *Gezien de eind-termen en de toelichting daarop voor literatuur en CKV I zijn tekstverklaringmethoden nu officieel*'. (Mulder 1997, 20).

More information on the influence of Reader Response criticism on the 'Tweede Fase' can be attained by consulting Mulder's more than helpful *Literatuur in het studiehuis*.

The challenge for the foreign language teacher then is to find activities, emanating from the reading of a particular text, that are student-oriented and aim to involve the students in their reading process. In my opinion, it is these activities that are the key to the students' ultimately internalizing the work of literature. Merely reading the work and answering questions is not sufficient if we want the pupils to connect with what they have read. The activities should be carried out by the pupils, and if possible, initiated by them as well. They should be done in conjunction with other pupils. Teachers must relinquish their role as sources of 'correct' answers, and encourage the students to engage in student-focused activities. These activities should involve decision-making, question-making, forming opinions, and

making choices as well as some other form of personal expression. What we must strive for is the personal response.

In sections 2 and 3 of this article, I will describe a series of lessons I have taught (and the accompanying results) in 2001 at a school in which I applied the text experiencing principles mentioned above. A not readily accessible piece of literature was presented to students with accompanying activities. My intention in this lesson series was to illustrate the difference in response by students between simply reading the text and reading the text followed by activities designed to promote internalization of the material. Although the material for the lesson series I gave was in English, there is no reason why the techniques and principles I employed should not be applied successfully to other languages for literature study. In section 4 I will discuss a few more of the myriad of activities that can be used for text experiencing lessons. In section 5 I will apply some of these activities to another poem, by way of illustrating that these kinds of activities are multi-purpose, and not limited in their application to specific circumstances. Those of us who wish to impart more than the written or spoken word will be gratified by the results of carefully selected activities in literature study.

2. *The lesson series*

In the first quarter of 2001 I devised a series of lessons for a 5 atheneum class at a school in Amsterdam. The school in question has a separate literature subject, and divides up the in-depth study of the major literary movements between the foreign languages. English is allotted the discussion of the Romantic period. For the discussion of this very important period in English literature, it was decided to focus on a lengthily and in many ways inaccessible poem: 'The Rime

of the Ancient Mariner' by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. This poem was written in 1798 in, albeit Modern English, an archaic form. The poem is steeped in classical and biblical symbols and references, thus foreign to the modern-day students I was teaching.

Besides introducing the students to this admirable poem and illustrating its adherence to the tenets of the Romantic Movement, it was my intention to encourage students' appreciation of the poem, and to encourage a feeling of connection with, at least, an aspect of its substance. Initially the students were to read through the poem, as they were accustomed, and then participate in some carefully selected activities aimed at promoting their interaction with the text. Furthermore I hoped that this technique of approaching seemingly irrelevant (but worthwhile) literature would become a part of the repertoire of the students when approaching other difficult works of literature, in other languages as well.

The series was ordered according to the 'Fasenmodel voor het studiehuis' (Mulder 1997, 33-37) In the 'Fasenmodel' learning tasks are organized in phases or stages as follows: the preparatory, processing, and reflective stages. According to the 'Fasenmodel', the learning process is initially teacher-guided, gradually transferred to the students. The 'Fasenmodel' stipulates the sequence tasks should ideally follow.

The lesson series comprised eight lessons during which this poem of 625 lines was to be read, and reader response activities, including a presentation, were to be carried out.

In the first lesson I gave an introduction in which I outlined how I expected the series of lessons to proceed, and what I expected of the students. In the first place we would read and listen to the poem, predominantly together, and in class. I expected that the actual reading of and getting acquainted with the poem would be done in a time span of three lessons. Students would be required to keep a logbook

in which they were to record: 1) the story-line (objective), 2) their activities alone or with others (objective), 3) their opinions vis-à-vis: poem, activities, and assignment (subjective). The students were assured that they would not be evaluated on the contents of their logbook, that it was to serve as a reflective instrument to record their responses.

In addition to this, and in accordance with the agreement of the school, I advised the students that I intended to discuss the salient features of the Romantic Movement in the hope that, at the end of the series, they would be able to recognize these features of Romanticism in the poem; and subsequently in other works representative of this movement.

The other activities to be carried out during this series of lessons were then explained to the students. They would be presented with thirteen copies of drawings made by Gustave Doré in conjunction with a publication of the poem in 1875. They would be asked to assign a line or lines of the poem to each individual drawing. I advised them that it was possible to have different answers, as long as they were able to justify their choices plausibly.

The final activity expected of the students was a presentation. They would work in pairs or, if they so wished, in groups of threes. In any case the presentation was to be a personal and creative reaction to the poem. Students would be asked to respond to an aspect of the poem that appealed to their imaginations, in a manner that suited them.

Finally I explained that I would attempt to show in this series of lessons that personal interest in literature can be enhanced by working more intensely with the text. In this way it is easier for readers to comprehend the relation of one work to another and to determine which of these works of literature best express their own feelings and beliefs.

At the end of the lesson, we began reading and listening to 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'.

The aim of the second lesson was to get the students well into the reading of the poem. In addition, I intended to introduce them to some terminology and poetical forms used in this poem and, at the same time, characteristic of (Romantic) poetry. In the third and fourth lessons the poem was read through and clarified. Questions, initiated by me, were posed. These were aimed at drawing a parallel between the theme of the poem and modern-day experiences, and were meant to motivate a feeling of connection with the themes in the poem.

At this point in the reading and discussion, the students began to show a marked increase of appreciation in the poem. Comments like the following began to appear in their logbooks: 'I really don't mind reading the poem. I actually even enjoy it a bit. That amazes me because I'm not really into poems, I usually don't like reading at all, but it's so well written and you really can imagine what's happening.'

At the end of the fourth lesson, the text experiencing activities were to commence. At this juncture a stencil was distributed with the final presentation assignment required to round off this series of lessons. The assignment stipulated that the students work cooperatively in pairs or in groups of three. Tasks were to be divided equally between members of a group. For this assignment the students were to make a choice between four activities. The activities were geared towards eliciting creative responses to the poem. A range of possibilities was provided so that students could pick the type of creative response that appealed to them and best expressed their relationship with the text. Students were given the choice of:

- selecting a painting or piece of music that complements the poem, and or clearly reflects an aspect of the poem;
- making an illustration: painting, drawing, collage, comic, to highlight an aspect of the poem;
- reciting a part or parts of the poem dramatically;

- re-writing the story in another form, with the possibility of transferring the story line to a modern-day situation.

The aim of the fifth lesson was to discuss Romanticism with the students and to encourage them to find examples in the poem, either in theme or form, which tied the poem in with the Romantic tradition. For this purpose, I made up a stencil composed of several quotations from authoritative sources e.g. 'Other aspects of romanticism in the 18th century are: a) an increasing interest in Nature, and in the natural, primitive and uncivilized way of life; b) a growing interest in scenery, especially in its more untamed and disorderly manifestations; c) an association of human moods with the 'moods' of Nature - and thus a subjective emphasis on natural religion...' (Cuddon 1992, 815).

After working with the quotations and books provided in the class, the students were to present their findings in a class discussion. The purpose of this activity was to establish the salient features of Romanticism and provide examples of those features from the text. These examples then were to serve as memory aids as to the main characteristics of the Romantic Movement and connect this series of lessons with the integrated literature course.

During the sixth lesson, the last lesson in which I orchestrated activities, students worked with copies of thirteen Victorian drawings that accompanied a publication of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' in 1875. I asked the students to take some time and look at the drawings. After that they were asked to look through the poem and find a caption for each drawing. They were to find the most appropriate caption, either a spoken one or a description. Although the drawings were fairly explicit, I emphasized the subjective nature of the assignment by advising the students that all answers were acceptable, as long as they could be justified from the student's

point of view. This activity was to be done in pairs or groups, and students were encouraged to speak and interact with one another in finding suitable captions. The students appear to have enjoyed this lesson, the aim of which was to encourage a feeling of connection with the poem by supporting the written with the visual. The following was one of the positive reactions to the assignment: 'The most fun assignment that you gave was matching some pictures to certain lines of the poem. I really liked seeking the lines that matched best with the pictures.'

The last two lessons of the lesson series were devoted to the presentations. This was to be the 'proof of the pudding', evidence that the interest of the students for 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' had been awakened and its content sufficiently internalized.

There were six presentations in total. Each presentation was more amazing than the one that preceded it. The first presentation was given by a boy on his own. He made a painting of the proverbial albatross in the poem, shot through by an arrow falling gracefully but unequivocally into the sea. The Mariner's ship figures in the painting, as well as a depiction of the sea, on one side of the painting angry, on the other side calm. In the presentation this student gave he explained why he had painted his picture as he did, he referred to the story-line and his interpretation of the poem.

The next group of three students presented their creative response to 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' poem in the form of a Haiku poem. The story-line had been altered for poetic purposes, but was easily recognizable in the Haiku:

O bloody parrot
I shot you with my shotgun
And that's my story

O lovely morning
 Listen, my dear wedding guest
 Upon thou shall learn
 [...]

The three gave a lively presentation, and apparently had a fine time with the preparation of their presentation.

In the next lesson the presentations continued with a group of three students who had written a short story along the lines of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' but with a modernized plot! The story traces the escapades of a youthful computer addict who brutalizes his sister, but through supernatural intervention (his computer goes on the blink!), awakens to his responsibilities to his sister and, by extension, to the human race.

The Story of the Modern Computer Freak

Once upon a time there was a computer freak, George, who loved nothing except his computer. He had his own little, gray, somber room with his computer in it and besides that, he had nothing at all. George rarely came out of his room, every once in awhile he had to get out, to get some nutrition. George never got out of the house to enjoy the beauty of nature nor had he any friends. The only thing he had, were his parents and his little sister, but he neglected them.

The girls read the poem with amusement but, at the same time, feeling. Their message was clear, and true to the tradition of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'.

After these girls came a young man who chose to recite a part of the poem dramatically. This young man did not hesitate to use the classroom as his stage. He groaned, he moaned, he swayed to and fro; silences fell only to be broken by supplications all where deemed necessary by this young thespian. His was not merely an interpretation of the

poem, but a veritable rendition and it too, was captivating.

The next pair of students, after long searching, had found a version of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' set to music by a heavy metal band called Iron Maiden. Their contribution consisted of playing select parts of this musical adaptation of the poem, and pointing out similarities and differences with the source.

One young man who had indicated a definite lack of interest and willingness to cooperate in the beginning of the lesson series, made the final presentation. I was curious to see if this young man would exhibit any change in attitude toward the assignment and towards the poem after his presentation. In fact this student's presentation showed a remarkable change in attitude. He made two drawings of characters in the poem - good and evil. He eloquently explained to us why he had depicted the characters as he had, and what in the poem had motivated his decision. The drawings were very impressive, and even his classmates were (temporarily) rendered speechless.

3. Objectives of the lessons

Integral in this series of lessons, of course, was the question: considering that my objective is to facilitate comprehension and stimulate integration of less accessible but very worthwhile literature, what kind of activities could I employ to attain this end? Since my aim was primarily affective, it was clear that activities would have to be geared toward involving the student (reader) with the text. Tasks would have to be open and inspire a creative response. Creativity was of paramount importance in these activities for me because it is a manifestation in individuals of their personality and experience.

At the same time I felt very strongly that, except for the actual re-reading of the poem

and the evaluations, activities should be carried out cooperatively. By working cooperatively students would be stimulated to present their ideas and opinions to peers, and justify them. This is a very important step in forming an affective response.

Throughout this series of lessons, I was convinced that the degree to which these activities would be successful in enhancing interest and connection with the poem would be apparent by the quality of the final assignment.

Bearing the above statement in mind, I, nonetheless, employed two forms of testing apparatus to see if the objectives of the lesson series were adequately achieved. One, the logbook, mentioned in section 2, was to serve as a kind of diary recording actual endeavors and students' reactions to them. My intention was to ascertain if the students themselves were aware of any change in their attitude towards the poem.

The second testing apparatus I employed was a questionnaire. The only strict requisite of the questionnaire was that it be done by the students individually. It consisted of eight questions, ranging from objective to subjective. The first question asks the student to write a short summary of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'. The seventh question queries: 'Has the reading of this poem increased your awareness regarding the issues touched upon in the poem?'

Question eight is a semantic scale. Students are asked to rate the poem on a scale from 1 to 7, 1 being the most positive; 7 being the most negative.

4. snel	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	langzaam
10. mooi	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	niet mooi

The questionnaire was handed out twice during the lesson series, the first time directly after the reading of the poem. The purpose of timing it thus was to get an indication of the initial response of the students to the poem prior to actually having carried out the reader response activities. The second time the questionnaire was handed out was at the end of the lesson series, after the last presentations had been given. My expectation was that there would be a shift in the students' reactions, indicating that through the activities comprehension and involvement with the poem had increased. I did not expect that the students would all actually like the poem better, but I did expect that they would have worked through it more intensely than if they had read and then analyzed it with text-centered activities.

Upon comparing the questionnaires, a definite shift in attitudes was apparent. All of the students indicated a change in attitude; half towards the positive, the other half towards the negative. Again it is irrelevant whether or not the students actually liked the poem more or less. It is, however, important to register a shift in their response.

In the case of one bright, sensitive student the assignments were always carried out very seriously. The questionnaire, both times, was filled in meticulously. From the questionnaire a shift in this student's response was detected. Especially in the semantic scale, consisting of ten oppositions, his response differed from the first questionnaire to the second, nine out of ten times! In six instances his reaction shifted towards the negative, in the other three instances, the shift was to the positive. This would seem to indicate that, as Sjaak became more familiar and at ease with the poem, his reaction was affected. In the logbook Sjaak recorded his actual opinion of the poem and the activities. From that medium we can see that he grew to appreciate the poem as well: 'Ik vind het gedicht steeds mooier.'

The most important indicator was this young

man's presentation, a dramatization of several parts of the poem. This was creative and emotive, creative because he exhibited a sincere attempt to dramatize his interpretation of the poem, emotive because the quality of his performance demonstrated his feeling of connection. His performance dumbfounded the other students. It was haunting; it was superb.

The logbook often provided clarification of the shifts evidenced on the questionnaires. Here reactions to the poem and the assignment were recorded that do not have to be assessed, compared or decoded!

Reactions to the logbook ran along these lines:

'The making of a logbook is quite a nice idea, to my humble opinion.'

'The strong points of the lessons were: the information about rhyme, the variety of the program (reading, discussing, looking at pictures and finally the presentation and letting us hear the poetry on tape. The weaker points were: the logbook and the rating sheets (although they were necessary it was a boring part) and that she talked too much, which made a few lessons boring. (!) (evaluation)'

'I think that it's a very good to make a summary for yourself about each poem. Then you can see if you understand it and it will also help by learning for the test.'

Regarding the assignments the students wrote:

'I think I really understand the aspects of the poem. I think that the homework that you gave really helped me a lot getting more involved in the poem, because I was a bit forced to reread every part at home to make a summary of it afterwards. The

most fun assignment that you gave was matching some pictures to certain lines of the poem. I really liked seeking the lines that matched best with the pictures. As a result of the special assignments, most of us really got involved in the material. If I'm involved in the lessons I'll usually put more effort in. The lessons about Rime of the AM were good, because I learned a lot from analyzing the poem.'

About the poem the students wrote:

'The story is, in two words, very impressive.'

'I normally dislike poetry, but I really loved working with this poem... It was a very long poem, but that didn't matter at all, because it was a beautiful poem and perfectly understandable.'

'We liked the poem generally, though we didn't think we would... The conclusion is we did like it though we don't think it's necessary to spend a month reading it (!)'

From the students' comments we can conclude that they were, on the whole, enthusiastic about the poem and, for the most part, reaped the fruits of the accompanying activities. Comments indicate that individual students were inspired to an appreciation of the poem they were evidently not aware of being capable.

From the data that the testing apparatus (the questionnaire and the logbooks cum evaluations) used in this lesson series provide us, it is possible to say that the activities aimed at bringing about a personal response from the students indeed heightened their appreciation and feeling of connection with the work.

4. Activities

In this section I want to take a look at other text-experiencing activities. These activities are aimed at activating students in their own learning process and at aiding them to extract a meaning from the text that is relevant and significant to them.

One of the most readily available and effective forms of activities geared at getting students to interact with the text is the process of formulating questions: 'It is hypothesized that real, knowledge-seeking questions promote students' engagement, which in turn leads to higher level of response to literary texts.' (Janssen 2000, 10).

Reader Response theories regarding textual interpretation downplay the existence of textual meaning as a separate entity and emphasize the fact that each reader seeks his own meaning in a text. Personality and experience are recognized as playing significant roles influencing one's interpretation of meaning from a text. Therefore Reader Response theories take text as well as reader into account when attempting to extract meaning. Louise Rosenblatt, in her theories of Reader Response, talks about a transaction between reader and text. A text's meaning arises out of a to-and-fro relationship between text and reader. The text and reader are on equal footing. Part of responding to a text is raising questions about its contents. Students' questions, in and of themselves, are seen as a primary response to literature and should demonstrate the student's own quest for knowledge arising from feelings, experiences, images, associations, or the lack of them.

Normally students have many questions regarding a difficult text, but are rarely encouraged to ask them. Instead they are trained to answer questions. Allowing students to generate their own questions permits them to focus on that part of a text which intrigues them the most, and for which they wish to have clarification. The source of a student-

generated question is often a hiatus in personal experience. The search for an answer can aid the student to identify and internalize the themes of a text.

One of the ways that questioning can be stimulated is to have students engage in the 'reciprocal reading' method of perusing a text. Reciprocal teaching is a strategy introduced in 1984 by Palinscar and Brown in the United States. The aim of the strategy is to help pupils with reading problems by promoting comprehension of text and monitoring skills. It has been very successful with children with reading deficiencies. The strategy seeks to attain reading competency by activating and involving pupils in their learning process. Reciprocal teaching is done in groups. The technique is first taught to the pupils by modeling and then handed over to them as the actual teacher steps back. The students take turns, from that point on, assuming the role of teacher. They alternately take over the leadership and prompt discussion of a passage of the work being read. The actual teacher then concentrates on monitoring the proceedings of the group and coaching where necessary. The principle behind this is very similar to that behind the guided learning process embedded in the 'Fasenmodel'.

The techniques used in 'reciprocal teaching' can easily be applied by other groups engaged in reading a difficult text in the mother tongue or in a foreign language. Reciprocal teaching focuses on four goals in working through a text: predicting, question generating, summarizing, and clarifying. In predicting students are required to activate knowledge they already possess and predict what will happen in the text next. Students continue reading to prove or disprove their predictions. In generating questions students are taught to select aspects of the text that they would like to know more about. The next step is to frame a question. The idea is that students will become much more moti-

vated if they are seeking an answer to their own questions. When the students summarize they are deciding jointly as to the major issues in the text. There is no right or wrong only the meaning the students extract from the text, themselves. Lastly, upon clarifying the students pinpoint words or ideas that are difficult to understand and may impede their comprehension of the text. Students are then encouraged to remove these impediments by taking action: looking up words, rereading, or soliciting help from peers or teacher.

Questioning forms a significant part of the reciprocal reading strategy. The process of generating questions is believed to activate readers to seek answers to aspects of the text that intrigue them, and therefore heighten authentic interaction with the text.

Besides questioning and reciprocal reading, working with learning aids like grids and task sheets help students to access difficult literature. Grids and task sheets help activate students to identify important aspects of a text and to organize their own responses. They can be employed before, during or after reading the text when the students are in the process of working through the significance of the text, attempting to identify its themes and problems for themselves. The grids and task sheets may be done in groups or individually.

Especially applicable to poetry with much imagery is a sounds and sights grid. In a sounds and sights grid students record the sounds and sights described in the poem and in which lines they have found them. After recording these items, students are asked to assess the effects of the use of these sights and sounds. They are asked to describe the feelings they get from the poem. Students may also react to how these sights and sounds influence a (main) character's personality or actions in the poem.

A task sheet is empty and resembles a form that has to be filled in. A task sheet addresses a subject: friendship, relationships, challenges

etc. It instructs the student to look closely at the text. The students fill in the task sheet with information they have selected from the text and found to be relevant to the subject. Some sort of evaluation and solicitation of a personal reaction follows. The reactions recorded on task sheets cannot be considered correct or incorrect. They reflect the student's interpretation of the subject as it pertains to the text.

The activities and learning aids I have discussed represent a mere sampling of the myriad of creative tasks used to activate the student to a more personal relationship with the text. Inherent in the employment of these activities is the recognition that text appreciation is not gained by digestion of large portions of literature and their standard interpretations; but by introducing our students to texts, enabling them to savor these works and make them part of who they are.

5. Applications

In this section I would like to demonstrate the application of text-experiencing activities to another poem. I will do this in lesson form. Like 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', this poem dates from the Romantic period of British poetry. It is written in a northern English dialect, which would undoubtedly cause difficulties to non-native students, if not presented methodically. Unlike with 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', this lesson has not yet been given; but I believe that it could easily be. This lesson follows the same system as used in that of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', namely the 'Fasenmodel voor het studiehuis' (see section 2). Here, as well, I have attempted to select activities aimed at personal interaction with the text, intended to increase comprehension and heighten engagement.

The poem I would like to consider is 'To a Mouse' written in 1785 by Robert Burns. For the

discussion of this poem, I would like to apply the reciprocal reading technique, adapted to the exigencies of this poem. Treatment of this poem should encompass no more than two lessons, during which time the students will again be asked to work cooperatively.

In the preparatory phase of the discussion of 'To a Mouse' the teacher should provide some background information about Robert Burns, and the dialect he uses in his poetry. It might be nice, at this stage, to tell the students that Burns is the author of 'Auld Lang Syne', sung by English people around the world to ring in the new year.

Subsequently the teacher should read the poem through with the students. By doing this the teacher can: 1) aid in the reading of this poem in dialect; 2) get the students on common ground from which they may begin their activities.

At this point, the students should appoint a surrogate teacher who will serve to guide the discussion. For the processing stage the students may read the poem following reciprocal reading methods. They should read fragments of the poem, stop and alternately generate questions, summarize, and seek clarification. Questions should be made up individually, and then presented to the group for discussion. Questions should be well thought out, and reflect the student's earnest wish to attain more information on the issue queried in the question. Summarization of the poem should be done at least twice. One student begins, others augment or edit the initial attempt. Clarification may be sought by any of, or by all of the students. There are many difficult words used in this poem, and although a copy of the poem with a translation of the pure Scot's words should be provided to the students, there will undoubtedly be other words, expressions, or ideas that require clarification.

It is the responsibility of the teacher to monitor the activities of the students. The

teacher should encourage authentic, not perfunctory questioning. The teacher should prompt students to include certain concepts in their summarization, but insist on the fact that meaning is a subjective thing and cannot be deemed right or wrong. The teacher should stimulate the students to seek clarification in discussion with each other. If this proves unsatisfactory, the teacher could refer the students to reference books; otherwise, the teacher may be the source of clarification himself! At the end of this stage students should be clear as to the significance they jointly assign the text.

In the final stage, the reflective stage of treatment of 'To a Mouse', groups will be asked to report to other groups on the themes of the poem they identified. They should also report on the success with which they carried out the reciprocal reading activities, and mention where there is room for improvement in the future.

Although generally the treatment of a poem, indeed any literature, should be carried out in steps or phases with objectives clearly stipulated for each particular phase, the types of activities or indeed the amount of or length of the activities is a variable which can be determined most cleverly and creatively by an enthusiastic teacher. In fact, notwithstanding the possibility of using known and tried activities, teachers can virtually tailor-make their activities to enhance comprehension and promote active and willing involvement by the students.

6. Conclusion

*Nature... Doth teach us all to have aspiring
minds. (I Tamburlaine II. vii. 20)*

If we, as educators, subscribe to the sentiment in this quotation, then we may feel confident that literature will never lose its luster with

the young. We should feel confident that good literature will continue to be read and loved, and that our students, possessing the aspiring minds we have helped nurture in them, will continue, in their way, to pursue it.

It is, according to Tamburlaine, natural in mankind to seek knowledge and, I would add, to pursue that which is aesthetically rewarding. Literature itself will continue to provide, as it has indeed for centuries, enough incentive for perusal.

Merely by giving lengthily reading assignments, composed of works selected and approved by us, will not encourage students to become discerning consumers. Neither will they be properly trained in comprehension of difficult texts; nor can they be said to have acquired, through our efforts, a genuine appreciation of literature. Thus we will not have taught them or equipped them; we will have fed them.

It has been the focus of this article to illustrate that our task, as educators, is not to force-feed volumes of the classics, but to train our students in the skills they need in order to approach, understand, and appreciate works of literature; or, to use an old-fashioned expression: to get the most out of it.

Therefore instead of having students focus on the text, and step-by-step analyze, interpret, and evaluate it, we need to focus on the reader. We need to convey the message that the key to interpreting the significance of a text lies in the relationship that arises between reader and text. In order to uncover meaning, the reader (student) must interact with the text by engaging in activities that will enable him to work towards this goal. These activities should be so structured that at every stage of reading - before, during, and after - students actively seek to understand and respond. In every phase of the treatment of a text, parallels are to be drawn to the world (of literature) around us and to the students

themselves as thinking, responsive individuals. In addition to this students learn that their interpretation of literature is valid. There is no correct or incorrect; it is their response, based on familiarity with the text and a genuine and personal effort to ascribe it meaning, that counts.

In this way the *eindtermen* for literature in the 'Tweede Fase' become attainable. Students are to learn how to read and respond to literature. Furthermore they are to be exposed to so many types of literature that they are able to distill, for themselves, a personal preference in literature. They are now in a position to do so because we will have given them the skills to approach even, heretofore, unapproachable texts. It is not unlikely that the text-experiencing approach will lead to their acquiring a taste for heretofore highly inaccessible works.

In accordance with the aims of the *eindtermen* and through the active personal experience with literature espoused by the text-experience methods, students may gain an understanding of human condition, as well as society and culture. Students may recognize themselves or others in a literary work. This may help them to define an attitude or form a stance regarding their own situations. Literature can be very influential in character forming of young individuals.

The series of lessons I gave demonstrated that a long, and difficult piece of literature could be approached systematically with reader response activities. Reading the poem and subsequently assigning activities selected to stimulate interaction with the text brought about a better understanding as well as increased engagement with the poem. The evidence for this was provided by the presentations done by the students at the end of the lesson series. These presentations were no less than breathtaking. They exhibited not only a grasp of the text, but also an appreciation of and sympathy for its meaning.

It is my opinion, and has been the premise of this article that text-experiencing activities provide the key to actively engaging students with a text. From these activities, we may expect a genuine response to and a greater degree of integration of the substance of the text. Furthermore the application of reader-oriented activities in literature is, unequivocally, the best way to realize the affective objectives of the *eindtermen* of the 'Tweede Fase'.

The beauty of text-experiencing activities is that they are not limited. They do not work better in one language, and worse in another. Nor are they only applicable to one genre of literature. They can be used for novels, short stories, drama, and poetry alike. As long as there is a genuine interest to increase comprehension and a wish to stimulate integration of the text in the mind and heart of the student, no other requirement exists for their fruitful application.

To really make literature study work, our sincere efforts and attention must focus primarily on the reader, in our case the student, and not on the text. It is here that we must do our work; here we must instill an attitude. If we really want literature to take hold of our students and never let go again.

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