

textual meanings, enabling the readers to understand the text and the world, yet the analysis is purely textual, with few speculations about the psychology of the interpreters. The reader's reception of the texts that have been analysed would have supported Jeffries claims, demonstrating their psychology and discourse processing. Another issue is that even though the different types of opposition have been very well described and explained, there is no mention of how they can be employed in language teaching. However, I believe that the study of opposites has direct relevance for language teachers and educators. If opposites can be taught contextually through authentic texts such as newspapers, magazines and political speeches by focusing on their type, use and function rather than through wordlists, then the simple topic of opposition can enrich the way in which learners think and respond to texts and the world around them. The work thus, has a wide appeal and can be of interest to college level students and teachers at the school or university levels in the fields of linguistics, language education and literature.

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Website Review

Teaching Poetry: A Review of Some Websites

Shreesh Chaudhary

Poetry is perhaps the oldest and most popular genre of literature globally. Yet poetry remains under-utilized in language classrooms and also a source of lot of anxiety. In India, poetry is taught mostly as a part of literature component in the syllabus. However, can it also be used in the "language" classrooms? Can it be used for teaching language? How can it be best taught for its own sake? Is it possible to teach how to write poetry? Is it possible to create among students a liking for (English) poetry? These are some of the questions that fuel our anxieties in using poetry to teach language. At the center of this anxiety is the asymmetry that use of language purely for informational purposes has over using language for aesthetic reasons in classrooms. There is a change coming; research shows that our knowledge of language, among other things, includes our ability to decode sentences, but 'motivation' plays a central role in language acquisition. With this awareness there has arisen a not too-well articulated but an ever-growing need in language classrooms in India for new material that is both authentic and interesting. Poems as songs have always answered this need. Today they are available easily and aplenty at the Internet.

When we google the words "Teaching poetry" the site of the Poetry Society of the United Kingdom comes up right on top. This site gives the "Top Tips for Teaching Poetry"¹. Closely following it at number two is the site of the American Academy of Poets, which offers "Tips for Teaching Poetry"². The first page of the result of the search "Teaching poetry" also gives links to other popular sites. These are:

- 10 Ways to Use Poetry in Your Classroom
- How to Teach Poetry - Video & Lesson Transcript
- 25 Great Ideas for Teaching Poetry
- Best 25+ Teaching poetry ideas...
- The Teaching of Poetry | Education.com
- Five Poetry Teaching Tips for New Teachers
- Innovative Approaches to Teaching Poetry: Pre-Reading Strategies

To see how poetry is taught to English-speaking students, I looked at the top two sites- the Poetry Society of the United Kingdom and the American Academy of Poets. The British site reports the methods and materials that "Trailblazer" teachers used to popularize poetry among students. The "2017 Teacher Trailblazer" Joanne Bowles advocates:

- Don't keep poetry in the classroom
- Create poetry bookmarks for distribution
- Tell students what poetry actually is
- Share your tastes with students

Kate Brackley, another Trailblazer of 2017, advises poetry teachers to:

- Write with the students
- Use poetry to get to know your students
- Use poetry in every scheme of work

Donna Kedward, a Trailblazer from 2015 and 2016 suggests we should:

- Read poetry for pleasure
- Create displays
- Use visual stimuli
- Create a certain atmosphere

Ben Bransfield, yet another Trailblazer, advocates:

- Written feedback
- Next draft
- Poems that "your team" has discovered
- Successful poetry writing lessons again

The Academy of American Poets offers a summary of best practices in this field. In America, April is celebrated as the National Poetry Month. Then there are events such as "Poetry Festival" and "Poetry out Loud" of Teachers & Writers Collaborative and similar efforts by the National Council of Teachers of English, etc. The American Poets website has a write-up under "Tips for Teaching Poetry", that has been developed after taking into account inputs from these events and organizations. The write-up is divided into four sections called "Preparation", "Reading", "Writing" and "Other Activities". The site on the whole advises to make poetry a part of everyday life of students, this can be done through various means such as, decorating the class with poetry and poets, holding poetry contests, handing out poetry in cafeteria and organizing field trips to places that have connections to poem read and discussed in the class. Slowly classes can develop their own anthologies which can not only include poems by published poets but also by students themselves that have been read, enjoyed and discussed amongst students. Some other recommendations include memorizing, reciting and publishing students' works. Further, the academy advises excursions and visits to sites of poetic interest and writing poems about them, organizing poetry writing festivals, poetry competitions, rewards for recitation and composition, etc. Decorating the classroom and other available walls and spaces with poems and pictures of poets can also be done to promote poetry.

Unlike the British site, the American sites mention schools where teachers and librarians have worked to together to popularize poetry. At Rye Country Day School in New York, students read out a favorite poem and explained its significance in the school assembly every morning. Miss Hall's School in Pittheld, Masschusettes, encourages teachers to begin meetings with poems, either their own or those

composed by students or anyone else, and then to mail them to friends and family. The school also sponsored contests where the focus was on poetry and presentation skills. Poetry clubs at the United Nations International School of New York meet weekly to discuss a chosen poem. After examining the Brueghel painting "Peasant Wedding" and reading William Carlos Williams' poem on it, the students also wrote a poem about the painting. In all, the site hosts 20 schools that work towards making poetry popular.

Many of these things may not be easy to implement in an English class in India. In fact, few schools in India can publish anthologies of poems written by the students. However, there are some schools such as Rishi Valley School in Chittoor, which conduct poetry workshops for students. Some of these workshops have been led by the noted Indian-English poet Gieve Patel. Some years ago, the school brought out an anthology of poems written at these workshops. Sadly, though, such efforts in India seem to be limited to elite schools. Having said this, students' poems do get published in school and college journals. It is also possible to organize poetry festivals, set up poetry clubs, have teachers illustrate poems with additional audio or visual material in the classroom before presenting a poem, etc. India has a long tradition of writing, teaching and using poetry. One of the spaces where poetry intersects with popular culture is in film music, where many poets like Gulzar, Sahir Ludhianvi, Javed Akhtar, Majrooh Sultanpuri and even Harivansh Rai Bacchan found space. Games like "Antaaksharii" are old and popular and represent just this mixing of poetry with everyday lives of the people in India. *Antaaksharii* is played between friends and family, the contestants are required to recite a new poem or song beginning with the last letter or sound of the song or poem presented by the rival. Poetry still excites, amuses and involves,

the long tradition is not dead, events like *Mushairas* and *Kavi Sammelans* are still active in many parts of the country. All we need is the will to use these resources.

I would like to close this review with two relevant personal experiences.

Most recently, I tried to teach English at a Hindi medium government primary school in my village in Bihar. The class comprised of forty children, all between eight to ten years of age; they were early learners in English. I wanted them to learn a poem by heart, only for its sounds and spelling, not for its meaning. I chose the following poem:

Piggy on the railway
Picking up stones
Down came the engine
And broke piggy's bones
Ah! Said the Piggy
That's not fair
Oh! Said the engine driver
I don't care

I wrote the poem on the blackboard in the class and recited it word by word. I got the children to repeat after me, all the while drawing the children's attention to how the letters had been formed. I am not sure whether the children learnt to write the poem within the one-hour session spread over two days, but they certainly memorized the poem by heart. To my amusement, I found a group of children reciting it outside a temple in the village. Perhaps they thought that like the other songs they knew in Hindi and Maithili, the local languages, this was also a prayer!

Some years ago, in a course in English at the Advanced Level (EAL) at IIT Madras, I included some sonnets from *A Suitable Boy*. This was a class of senior under-graduate students who were good in English and needed a course at their level. I wanted the class to see

the prosodic, grammatical and semantic features of a sonnet. I began by creating gaps in a randomly selected sonnet, given in the Annexe. The class was asked to fill in the blanks with suitable words. Each of these blanks could have been filled in with a unique word as the combination of grammatical, prosodic and semantic constraints did not allow any other word. The class took its time, but enjoyed the exercise. Many students also read the entire book and the course got a high rating. Many colleagues, I am sure, have similar success stories to tell. It is time our websites also reflect this change.

Annexure

Fill in the blanks in the following sonnet from Vikram Seth's 'The Golden Gate'. The blanks must be filled in such that the chosen word meets the demands of grammar, meaning and metre accurately. Check your answers with those given at the reverse of this page.

John's looks 1. _____ good. His dress is formal.

His voice is low. His mind is 2. _____.

His appetite for work's abnormal.

A plastic name tag 3. _____ around

His collar like a votive necklace.

Though 4. _____, he is far from reckless,

Pays his rent promptly, jogs, 5. _____ not

Smoke cigarettes, and rarely 6. _____,

Eschews both church and 7. _____ drinking,

Enjoys his garden, likes to 8. _____

Eclectically from Mann to Bede.

(A surrogate, some say, 9. _____ thinking.)

Friends claim 10. _____ grown aloof and prim.

(His boss, 11. _____, is well-pleased with him.)

Expected answers follow the poem are given below:

1. are
2. sound
3. hangs
4. well-paid
5. does
6. pot
7. heavy
8. read
9. for
10. he's
11. though

Endnotes

¹ Tips for Teaching Poetry | Academy of American Poets

² <https://www.poets.org/national-poetry-month/tips-teaching-poetry>

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