**Enhancing English Proficiency at Yessenov University through Literature**

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Teaching English as a foreign language is both an interesting and challenging process. Among the various methods and techniques, teaching English through literature stands out as one of the most effective. Since literature provides authentic material, it helps language learners immerse themselves in the real world of English. However, to achieve positive results, it is crucial for teachers to select appropriate literary texts. Key aspects to consider include the length of the text and its cultural relevance.

Literary texts are representational rather than referential (McRae, 1994). John McRae (1994) differentiates between literature with a capital 'L'—classical texts such as those by Shakespeare and Dickens—and literature with a small 'l,' which includes popular fiction, fables, and song lyrics. Today, literature used in English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms is no longer limited to canonical texts from countries like the UK and USA but encompasses works by writers from a diverse range of countries and cultures, using different forms of English.

According to Isariyawat, Yenphech, and Intanoo (2020), a simple definition of a literary text is writing in either prose or poetry. By this definition, even a mail-order item might be considered a literary text. However, to clarify the meaning, a literary text must exhibit good writing style.

Juden (1994) concluded that literature comprises books or writings acclaimed for their beauty, use of valuable language, and content that convinces the reader to experience enjoyment, consciousness, contemplation, and emotion as intended by the author.

In ELT classrooms, literary texts can be studied in their original forms or simplified versions, which are often written specifically for language learners. These texts can be explored both in and outside the classroom.

**The British Council Course Experience**

In January of this year, I completed a British Council course titled “Teaching English through Literature.” This four-week course for language teachers focuses on engaging and developing learners’ English language skills through a variety of literature-focused activities and teaching approaches. The course consisted of three modules:

1. **Foundations of Teaching English through Literature**
2. **Developing Receptive Skills through Literature**
3. **Developing Productive Skills through Literature**

The first module explored the use of literary texts to present language and develop language skills while keeping learners actively engaged and motivated. The second module covered methods to enhance learners’ listening and reading skills through effective literature-focused activities. The final module addressed strategies to improve learners’ speaking and writing skills using literature.

This course highlighted the significant role literary texts play in teaching English, which led me to incorporate literature into my English classroom.

**Implementation at Yessenov University**

During the spring semester of the 2022-2023 academic year, I taught an A1+ level General English class at Yessenov University in Aktau. The class consisted of 20 students with various majors, including metrology, engineering, tourism, and English language teaching. Choosing appropriate texts was challenging, but the university library offered good options such as *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver’s Travels*, *Around the World in 80 Days*, *Little Women*, *Robin Hood*, and *Pollyanna*, available in five stages from low to high levels.

I selected *Pollyanna* by Eleanor H. Porter for my class. The book's length and language were suitable for my students, and its content was engaging and motivational. *Pollyanna* tells the story of a girl who remains optimistic despite facing numerous challenges, a trait beneficial for young learners.

**Classroom Activities**

Using *Pollyanna* in the classroom positively impacted students' critical thinking and reading skills. Teaching English through literature integrates language and literary works, providing a rich source of linguistic input and opportunities to practice the four language skills – speaking, listening, reading, and writing – while exemplifying grammatical structures and presenting new vocabulary.

**1. Running Dictation (Reviewing Present Simple Tense)**

**Objective:** To practice the present simple tense through a running dictation activity based on Pollyanna’s morning routine.

**Procedure:**

1. **Preparation:** Stick the running dictation text on a wall outside the classroom.
2. **Pair Work:** Divide students into pairs. Assign one student as the "writer" and the other as the "reader."
3. **Dictation:** The "reader" reads a sentence or a few words from the text on the wall, memorizes it, and returns to dictate it to the "writer," who writes it down.
4. **Switch Roles:** Students switch roles after each sentence. This continues until the entire text has been dictated.
5. **Checking:** Once finished, each pair checks the other pairs' texts. The pair that completes the task first with the fewest mistakes wins.

**Running Dictation Text:**

“Pollyanna wakes up early. She goes downstairs. They have breakfast. They have eggs, bread, honey, cheese, and tea. They finish breakfast. Aunt Polly says, “Come.” Pollyanna stands up. They go into the living room.”

**Follow-up Activity:** Students complete present simple questions using prompts and answer questions about their own morning routines.

**Example Prompts for Questions:**

1. When / wake up early?  
   **Q:** When does Pollyanna wake up?  
   **A:** Pollyanna wakes up early.
2. Where / go?  
   **Q:** Where does she go?  
   **A:** She goes downstairs.
3. What / do?  
   **Q:** What do they do?  
   **A:** They have breakfast.
4. What / have for breakfast?  
   **Q:** What do they have for breakfast?  
   **A:** They have eggs, bread, honey, cheese, and tea.
5. What / say?  
   **Q:** What does Aunt Polly say?  
   **A:** Aunt Polly says, “Come.”
6. What / do?  
   **Q:** What does Pollyanna do?  
   **A:** Pollyanna stands up.
7. Where / go?  
   **Q:** Where do they go?  
   **A:** They go into the living room.

**Additional Activity:** Students answer questions about their own morning routines and interview two classmates about theirs.

**2. Comparative Clues (Practicing Comparative Adjectives)**

**Objective:** To practice comparative adjectives through a guessing game.

**Procedure:**

1. **Preparation:** Provide students with cards containing comparative clues related to characters or items from *Pollyanna*.
2. **Pair or Group Work:** Students work in pairs or groups. One student gives comparative clues, and the others guess the character or item.
3. **Giving Clues:** Students substitute the words in bold with pronouns and use comparative forms. For example, "She is younger than Aunt Polly."
4. **Guessing:** Other students guess who or what is being described.
5. **Scoring:** Points are awarded for correct guesses. The student or group with the most points wins.
6. **Creating Clues:** Students create their own comparative clues and share them with the class.

**Example Card:**

**Pollyanna**

1. young / Aunt Polly

2. cheerful / Mrs. Snow

3. poor / Dr. John Pendleton

**Example Clue:** "She is younger than Aunt Polly."

Students need to guess the name in bold at the top of each box. Students giving the clues will replace the bold words with pronouns and use comparative forms (e.g., “She is younger than Aunt Polly”). Other students then try to guess who is being described. Students take turns giving three clues to their partner or group. Each correct guess earns one point. The student or group with the most points wins. Once everyone has finished, the teacher may ask students to create their own clues, which they can then read to the class.

These activities, along with others used during the spring semester, demonstrate that literary texts offer a wealth of linguistic input and can help learners practice multiple language skills in an engaging and meaningful way.

**References**

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