

Different Approaches and Methods for the Teaching of Poetry in Indian Classes

Ganesh Wagh

Lecturer in English, Rao Bahadur Narayanrao Borawake College,
Shrirampur, Dist- Ahamadnagar, Maharashtra, India.

ABSTRACT

Poetry is an 'emotion recollected in tranquillity and by recollecting, we learn to feel, learn to experience nature in all its wild beauty, learn about the mysteries of the universe, and learn about love, happiness, joy and sorrow. It is found that in most of the teachers of colleges and schools the level of zest for teaching poetry is less. In the present state of teaching poetry in many schools and colleges, teachers are not able to show much faith either in the essence of poetry or in the powers of self-expression of the students. It is also found that some English teachers express great unease regarding teaching poetry. The teaching of poetry is the most difficult task but a teacher can make it a pleasant activity if he tries to show his eagerness to use different sorts of techniques and ideas while teaching poetry. A teacher can show his enthusiasm by reading it aloud and the way he presents the poem before the students for better understanding. If the teacher attempts to teach poetry in a lively manner by using his skills to unravel the meaning of a poem, the students will understand in a better way this most difficult genre of literature. This article presents how the most complex genre of literature such as poetry should be taught with ease by using various techniques and ideas in schools and colleges.

KEYWORDS

Teaching poetry; Methods; Indian classrooms.

"Poetry is the human soul entire, / squeezed like a lemon or a lime, / drop by drop, into atomic words." - Langston Hughes

English plays a key role in our educational system and national life. The British introduced English into our educational system to produce cheap clerks for their colonial administration. Indian national leaders drew inspiration from the writings of the great thinkers who wrote in English. English is rich in culture and literature. English is a link language. It has greatly contributed to the advancement of learning.

The teaching of English should be made more practical and language-oriented. We need knowledge of English for different purposes. English is to be taught as a language of comprehension rather than as a library language. There are many objectives of teaching English in Indian classes. The objectives of teaching English at the school and college level may be summed up as follows:

1. To speak English fluently and correctly.
2. To write English neatly and correctly.
3. To read English with comprehension at a reasonable

speed to use it as a library language for gathering information and for the pleasure of reading.

4. To appreciate poetry.
5. To develop an interest in English.
6. To expose the learners to real-life situations.

It is found that more than sixty per cent of today's world population is bilingual. If we talk about the Indian scenario, in most of the Indian classes in schools or colleges, most of the teachers follow the bilingual or multilingual method of teaching i.e. Grammar Translation Method. This method has its own merits and demerits. In this method of teaching, the student's native language is the medium of instruction and grammar is taught deductively, that is by presentation and study of grammar rules which are practised through translation. Some teachers also follow the Direct Method or Natural method. In this method, classroom instructions are exclusively given in a target language and oral communication skills are built up carefully by graded programmes organized around questions and answers exchanged between teachers and students in small intensive classes. There are various methods and approaches to teaching English too but in this article, I have concentrated on the teaching of poetry by using various techniques and ideas.

The teaching of poetry in schools and colleges is the most difficult and intricate task. A teacher has to be very careful while teaching poetry in Indian classes. If a teacher attempts to present the poem in a lively manner and uses different techniques to unravel the meaning of the poem, the students will take more interest in it and they will get more pleasure from the poem. While teaching poetry in Indian classes, a teacher can teach some features of poetry such as rhyme, voice, tone, pace, rhythm,

sound, structure and imagery through some lively exercises in the class.

Poetry is an art and that is why it is included in the curriculum to develop the aesthetic sense in the minds of students. The main objective of teaching poetry is to give enjoyment/ pleasure and to make aware the students by laying the foundation for the appreciation of what is beautiful in life. Teaching poetry aims to help students to read the verses and poems which appeal to the heart and imagination. The teacher's job is to explore the beauty of poetry to the students and to convey the poet's feelings to the students.

A good teacher should bear in mind that his students must get adequate pleasure from his teaching of poetry. So while teaching any poem a teacher has to learn by heart the poem, read the poem aloud with proper stress, intonation, and rhythm, and also make the students follow him by reading the same.

There are two approaches to the teaching of poetry – the creative approach, which dwells on how to write poetry and the approach of instruction, which seeks to inform the students about the mechanics, dynamics and analysis of poetry. To adopt the right approach, it becomes important to identify what kind of students you are dealing with. A balance between the two approaches is also possible. Whenever you teach poetry, choose poetry that delights and the one that is suitable for their age. To capture and enrapture their minds, you need to find poetry that is captivating and arresting – poetry that is individually delicate and sensitive.

The following techniques/ ideas can be used to facilitate the teaching of poetry for its better understanding.

1. Before starting the actual teaching of poetry, a teacher can involve the students in various activities related to the poem. For example, the students are quite familiar with

- limericks and they can be a useful starting point for understanding rhyme and rhythm. The teacher can display a limerick by writing it on the board or display it on O.H.P. / L.C.D in prose form and read it to the class as prose taking no notice of rhyme and rhythm. Ask the students if they have noted anything wrong with it and then ask them to read it out again and then the teacher reads it with proper pronunciation, rhyme and rhythm.
2. By giving an introduction or by asking pre-teaching questions regarding the poem, the teacher reads the poem loudly with correct pronunciation, stress, intonation, and rhythm while the students listen to it by closing down their textbooks. The Teacher can make this activity livelier if he uses audio-visual aids for the teaching of a poem. The teacher can use an audio cassette/ C.D. of a particular poem and play it in the class. The students will enjoy this activity which would surely enhance their understanding of the pronunciation of the words with proper rhyme and rhythm.
 3. The students are directed to read the poem silently and later the teacher solves the difficulties of the students by glossing the difficult vocabulary items so that the students will be able to understand the meaning of the poem in a better way.
 4. With his guidance, a teacher can ask students to comment on how the fast pace is created – word and line length, punctuation, sound and repetition. Students' observations should be noted on the board and also on their copies of the poem.
 5. A teacher should also give students a short list of themes or subjects and ask each of them to decide what kind of rhythm or pace would be more suitable giving reasons for their decisions.
 6. For teaching imagery in a poem, introduce the idea that imagery helps to create a picture for the reader. Provide students with two pictures and several strips on which are written descriptive images that relate to the element of the picture. Ask the students in pairs to match the images to the pictures in the place they think most befitting. The students can share their ideas and give reasons for their choices. This can be developed by giving students sets of different images and asking them to draw the scene or character as they see it from the images given. Again ask the students to share their work and look at how the images created certain pictures.
 7. Onomatopoeia and sound imagery can also provide students with a way of discussing poetry. Explain that poetry is often meant to be read aloud and the sound can, therefore, play a big part in the impression created by a poem. Display sets of onomatopoeic sounds and ask them to come up with what is being described. e.g. buzz, rustle, shriek, etc.
 8. Give the detailed meaning of the poem and then analyse the poem. Both stylistic, as well as thematic levels, should be analysed. The students will be able to discuss their ideas about what poetry is.
 9. Text completion and sequencing can be used to encourage students to explore the meaning of a poem. These sorts of tasks can be used to check the understanding at the end of teaching the poem. Give the students copies of the poem

missing key/ important words. Ask the students to fill in the gaps with words they think most befitting. Students can then read their poems to the class and differences can be discussed. Sequencing can also be used effectively. Divide a poem into segments and distribute it to the class. Ask the students to re-assemble the poem using clues they may find in rhyme scheme, rhythm, image patterns and so on.

Conclusion

In English language teaching, the teaching of poetry occupies an important role. By using the ideas/techniques mentioned above the teacher can facilitate the teaching of poetry and can make the poetry teaching a more enjoyable activity. Teaching poetry in the classroom will also contribute to the language learning process in which the goal is to provide practice to the learners in various skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking.

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