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## What Can Teachers and Learners Do with Literature?

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### **Abstract**

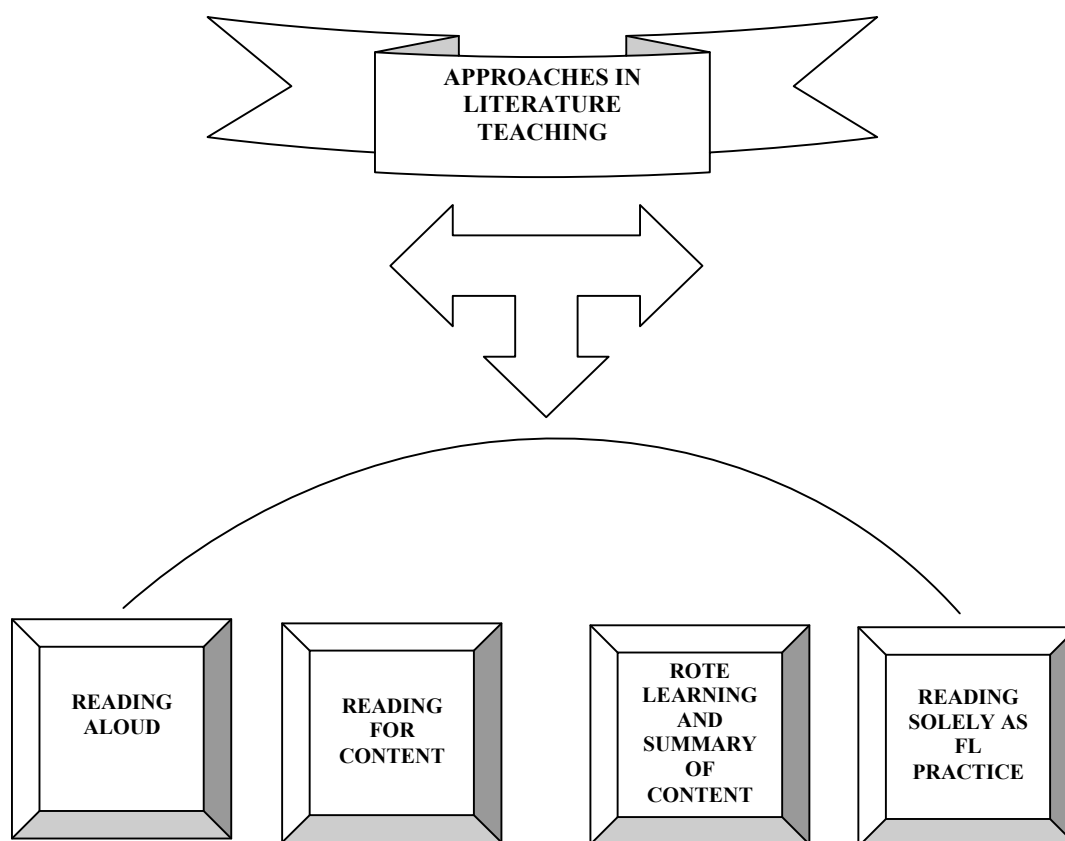
*Teaching literature is a many-sided activity, relating a huge number of reader and text-based characteristics. May be because of this, qualified teachers do not try to discover worldwide guidelines, a sequenced series of stages to be followed blindly and precisely. The numerous hands-on examples in this article are recommended in the knowledge that teachers will become accustomed with them in ways suitable for their respective literature teaching environments.*

**Key words:** *Teaching methods, reading, secondary literature, style analysis, personal-response*

### **Introduction**

In this paper, four types of activity which modern language methodologists tend to regard as old fashioned will describe succinctly, in addition to drawing a critical distinction with brand new approaches. It is necessary to observe right from the start that most ‘new’ methods integrate a synthesis of features of ‘old’ methods, those which are in our days still found in official programmes. That is why it is logical to state that the combination between new and old methods is a real state of affairs.

Allwright (1991) in his article entitled “The Death of the Method” makes an attempt to describe what happens in classrooms. In fact, he has revealed that classroom settings cannot be explained by a reduced number of methods, but basically by the interaction of numerous variables, only some of which can be explicitly observed and many of which go beyond linguistics as well as literary theory into exceedingly subjective fields of personality and feeling. In what follows, a general idea about four kinds of activity (see figure below) believed to be long-established approaches in literature teaching we will explained



**Fig 1:** Approaches in Literature Teaching

Both “*Rote learning*” and “*summary of content*” refer to learning the fundamental plot of novels or plays for instance, or facts in relation to the writer’s life, fitting history and politics. This takes place constantly in universities wherein the teacher provides facts to be learnt by rote by learners. It is worth mentioning to assert that there is no clear cut divergence between rote learning and summary of content only for the reason that in both cases students have to demonstrate a significant amount of truthful knowledge under examination setting.

In “Reading aloud”<sup>\*</sup>, many learners (even at advanced levels) have learnt English by the ‘read aloud first’ method and are uncomfortable with change. In reality this approach is regarded as a professional skill – most people do it wrongly even in their personal language. Students do

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<sup>\*</sup> Reading aloud is closely linked with nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century schooling, and lessons read about in novels and biographies.

not need to be good enough to read a text aloud! Clearly, reading aloud\*\* in class does not make better skills similar to gist extraction, rereading short section to confirm meaning, developing reading ability, or else skipping forward over monotonous passages.

The uses of translated texts as an object of study are widespread topics to which plentiful books are devoted. From time to time, the teacher does the greater part of the translation, on a regular basis even dictating or translating for the students to write. At some other times, students are engaged to work in groups on translations, the written product being checked by the teacher and/or read aloud to the class. All these methods are without a doubt predominantly wrong or fruitless. The objective is that the learner improves his knowledge more when he is made aware of the different techniques for using texts and the function of translation -.written or spoken should be gradually lessened. Nowadays experts understand that

*“ learners often need some more resources to translation, perhaps at the word level, perhaps at phrase level, which can either be supplied readymade, usually by the teacher, or found by the learner in dictionaries or notes, or constructed by the learner (guessed and worked out) by the learner and then checked. ”<sup>(1)</sup>*

However every bit of such translation is shortened and selective. In addition, there are conflicting viewpoints as regards the status of translation in language learning; that is to say, that translation

*“is not the best way to learn language, but is an ‘add-on skill’ which those already proficient in a foreign language can develop for very specific purposes. [Indeed,] good readers do not translate an L2 text, even in their heads, but understand it directly (and behave analogously in listening, speaking and writing). ”<sup>(2)</sup>*

The content of secondary literature, study of first-language literature at university level has by tradition incorporated word for word, summarised or if not reworked, in essay form: taking lecture notes, memorising them prior to exams or using them in essays. It is not easy to take a broad view about this activity, as the content of such secondary literature and what students do with it can change thoroughly. At one extreme there may be a collection of historical and

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\*\* Reading aloud is very difficult. In fact, a great number of people find it hard to read aloud in their own language. It is advisable to leave this type of reading at the end of a reading session.

biographical facts, scholarly findings on text variants, and even received opinions which students are expected, to do again with little change. As a matter of fact the greater part of university teachers would most probable claim that the study and use of secondary literature is not an end in itself, but should help in a open activity, which is writing about primary texts.

Such writing – usually in the form of an essay – should take account of the student’s personal thorough analysis of the main text; in spite of that, the secondary literature is believed to encourage as well as make an improved version of this analysis. There is, on the other hand, a difference of opinion which looks as if to split teachers about

*“(…) whether use of secondary literature is essential for a good essay, or merely desirable, or an optional extra, or even a [support] for weaker students, and the same teacher may answer this question differently for different essays and students’ levels.” (Ibid: 30)<sup>(3)</sup>*

In what follows, a variety of ideas which are, mostly speaking, less common, and almost certainly more in order with the common environment of ideas in ‘communicative’ foreign language teaching will be explained in turn. Our request is not that these activities are essentially vital to be included within the teaching process of literature; the aim is beyond doubt to make bigger the repertoire of both teachers and students.

Both facts and skilled teachers’ positions assert that, in countless situations, learners who read at length get better quickly than those who do not. It appears that, there are quite a few teachers who persuade their students to “*read for pleasure*” by means of shortened readers or ‘graded readers’ which can make available for them tests of reading levels, teaching guides for class readers as well as reading cards for beginners. Vincent and Carter (1986) gave a relatively critical opinion of the use of these abridged readers as they propose to use realistic texts for ‘simple material’, and, as a result, maintaining literary texts complicated and ‘authentic’, or using naturally easy material for instance children’s literature. By and large the widespread view recommends that “*The key variable is not simplification, not literary quality, but the reader’s personal enthusiasm*”\*

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\* According to Scovel the anxiety concept can be divided within two parts: facilitation anxiety and debilitating anxiety through which the learner can be motivated to “fight” the new language task in that it helps him

There is another type of reading called “*reading for content*” (Harmer, Jeremy, 2006). which can encourage students to make wider cultural horizons as well as lessen the learners’ imprisonment in the worldview and values of their own place and time (see figure below). The subsequent series of questions may possibly help to perceive better what is behind the genuine picture of reading for content:

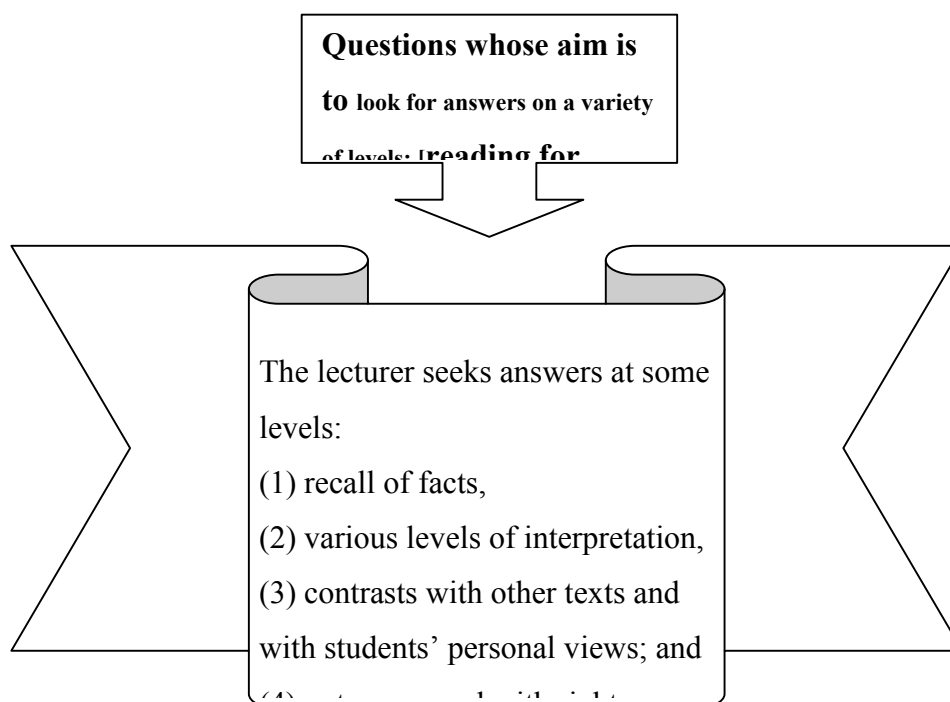
- What picture of Africa do you get from the novella of “*Heart of Darkness*”?
- What was life in Joyce’s Dublin?
- What would it be like to be one of Fitzgerald’s characters?
- Why has Hawthorne written about pilgrims’ way of life?
- What picture of America do you get from Fitzgerald’s “*The Great Gatsby*”?
- Why has Hemingway written “*The Old and the Sea?*”
- What does the title “Annabel Lee” stand for in the poem written poem Poe?

The lecturer may be looking for answers on a variety of levels:

- (1) a simple remembering of facts,
- (2) a number of levels of interpretation,
- (3) comparisons with other texts and with students’ personal views; and
- (4) may possibly be less worried with right answers than with the right attitude.

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emotionally for approach behaviour and debilitating anxiety which motivates the learner to flee the new learning task. (See Scovel, T. 1978.)



**Figure 2:** Reading for content

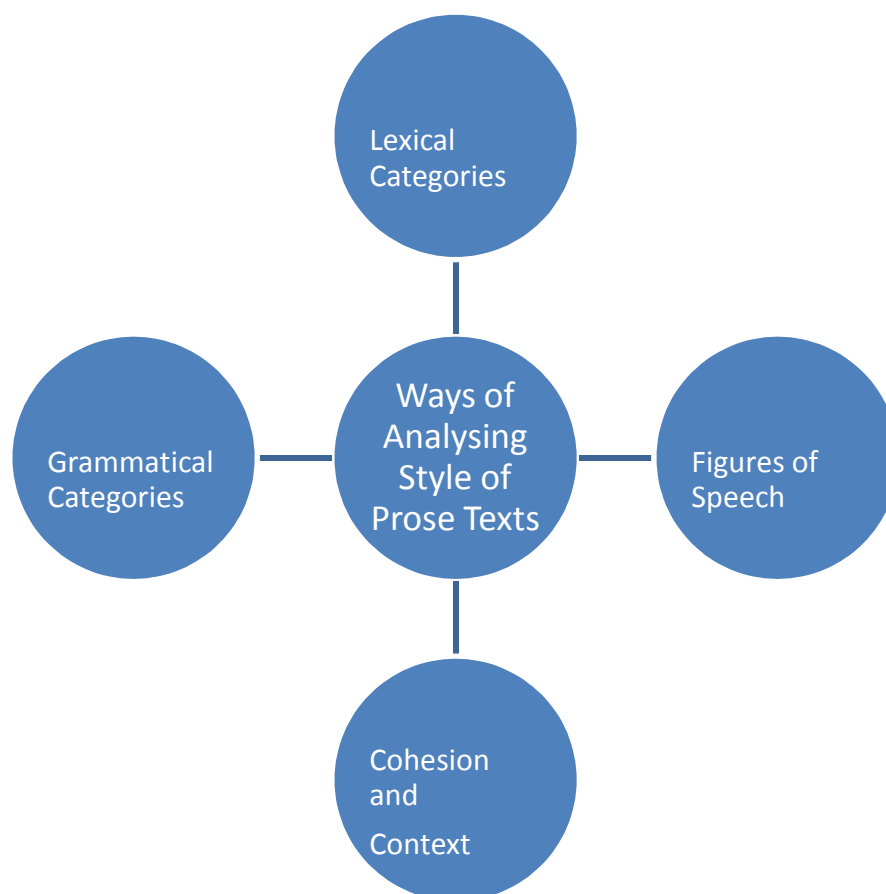
Yet there are at least two uncertainties, regarding this kind of teaching procedure. The first one has to do with the belief that “*cross-cultural awareness raising also belongs in other parts of the curriculum (history, social studies, and geography), and that works of literature can be used there*” (Vincent and Carter, 1986: 32). The second one refers to the danger of attempted propaganda through which religious beliefs might be integrated to “*produce a generation of hypocrites*” (*Ibid*). Nevertheless, we think that it is paramount to defend tolerance and mutual respect with the help of culturally open teachers.

“*Reading solely as foreign language practice*” refers to lectures wherein learners study a literary text, or more exactly an extract. The pedagogic aim is to urge learners to find new vocabulary, discover answers with questions about it, and possibly to do exercises on vocabulary and grammar about it. These kinds of questions as well as activities are abundant, from summary and paraphrase to write the story from a given point of view; however, the most important characteristics distinguishing this teaching process from other activity types are that the significance of the text as literature is not central. Yet again there are risks with the use of such activities for the reason that both short texts along with extracts can not only

‘mock up literature and slow down extensive reading but also hamper learner autonomy. As a whole, it is better to favour this teaching procedure merely as part of practical strategy.

Another major aspect of teaching activity which is widely used in many literature courses of literature for foreign language learners’ concerns “*Linguistic analysis*”. In this kind of analysis learners study cautiously the language of literary text wherein features such as deviance, regularity, polysemy and mimesis, as well as aspects of discourse organisation - cohesion, coherence or narrative structure, which in most cases function inside extended portions of text. The final step could be devoted to, criticism on or guesses regarding the aim and effect as well as meaning of such aspects.

The teacher needs also to make his students aware of the aim of the analysis of the artistic principles underlying a given writer’s choice of language. Therefore, a checklist of both linguistic and stylistic categories (see figure below) is necessary: (1) lexical categories, (2) grammatical categories, (3) figures of speech, (4) cohesion and context. In reality, the analyst may adopt either the top-down process where he begins his comprehension of the content or the bottom up process where the preliminary aim is the linguistic aspect. Yet, a number of categories might have familiar characteristics, i.e. the same feature may be mentioned under distinct headings that are a mixture of both.



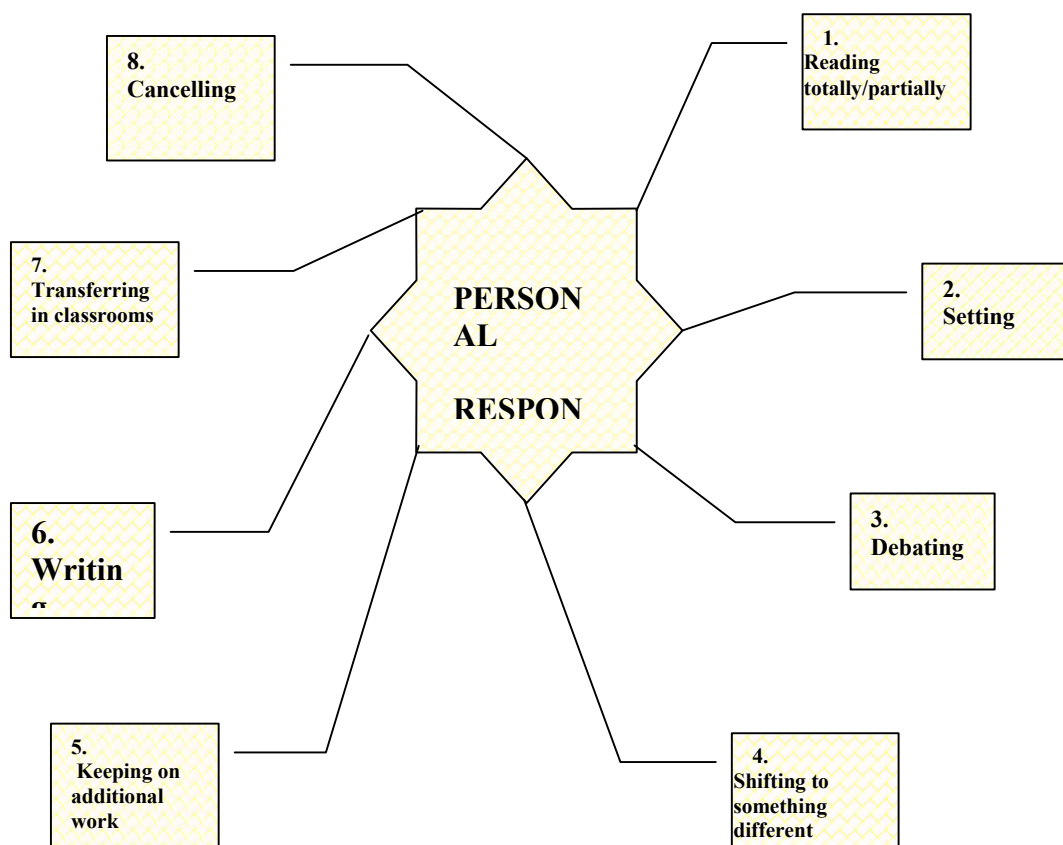
**Figure 3:** Ways of Analysing Style of Prose Texts  
(Adapted from G Leech )

In reality this teaching methodology is by and large practical in foreign language teaching situations for the reason that it urges the learner to not only become more concerned about his learning situation but also able to take steps to make up his mind about his problems as a non-native reader.

*“Personal response”* (see figure below) can be used with countless categories of classroom actions. Let’s give attention to two basically. In relation to the first, learners are asked about what books or types of books (novels, novellas, short stories, plays and poems) they hope to be trained at. As soon as they have begun reading it, they are asked how much they enjoy it, as well as what they hope to perform at the moment. In this manner, they will decide between ending or else cancelling it, reading it entirely or partially, transferring it in classroom settings or setting it on their own as assignments, putting it in writing or coming up by means of a



debate about it in different approaches, keeping on additional work of the similar nature before shifting to something entirely different.



**Figure 4:** Categories of classroom proceedings.

In lots of modules, students wait for the teacher to notify to them what to read, and will speak barely regarding what they in fact take pleasure in. Behaviours like these along with thoughts can be altered just gradually. Significant care is required in the choice of questions for individual response activities. To keep away from unpleasant or else awkward teaching state of affairs in which inhibition as well as anxiety\* will dominate, it is of primary importance to show students either with the help of

- a brief list of books to select from, by means of summaries and comments or

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\* Reader-response criticism claims that the interpretive activities of readers, rather than the author's meaning or the text arrangement, give details to a text's significance as well as aesthetic inference.

- an experimental lecture (or half-lecture) in which a fragment is examined prior to a class to take a decision whether to read a whole book, and perhaps
- a few video clips from a movie of the book or else a slide show concerning the place and time.\*\*

It is required to make use of group work in order to offer the possibility to groups of students to perform detailed tasks. From time to time external limitations like examination programme of study may occur; therefore, it is preferable to let the class be on familiar terms with all the feasible choices. Students in this case are pushed either to acquire or else borrow them or given permission to know the teacher's personal aims so that they can not only suggest a number of texts but also made aware of others.

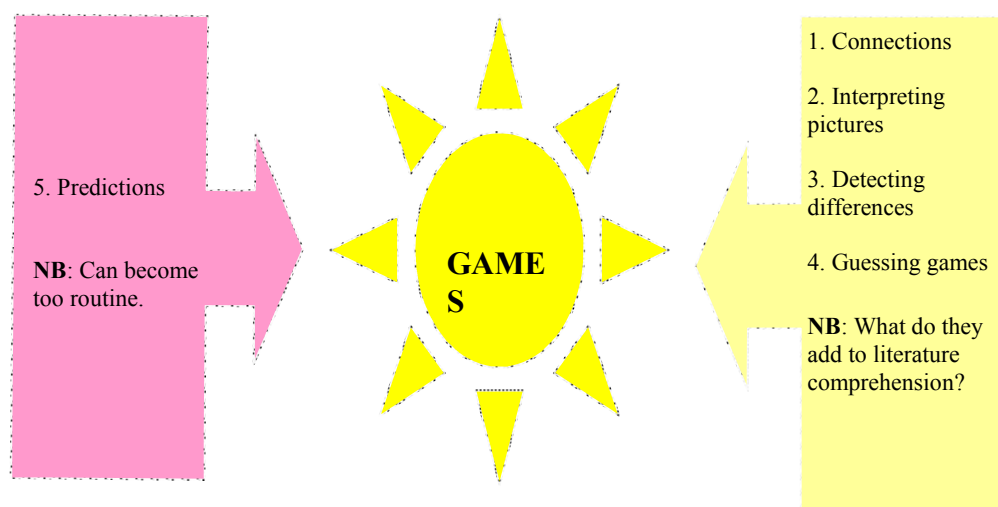
In this sort of personal response, students will be able first to expand the chances of studying the accurate book, i.e. one that students will take pleasure in and read fully along with comprehension. In the end, being conscious that views regarding a book are taken into consideration, both the actions of reading as well as the act of talking concerning the book have to be made genuine, valid and communicative. In this way, learners will be more encouraged to learn about facts and skills specifically and about literature learning as a general rule.

Research has shown that there is no evident distinction between games and activities. The most common games are *vocabulary matching* wherein words from a text are written on slips of paper, the definition on other slips of paper, and both are submitted to students, who have to discover a match, crosswords and similar puzzles; *charades* where learners have to 'demonstrate' a literary work or character by gesture without speaking; or '*Just a Minute*', which involves talking about a given topic for sixty seconds without hesitation, repetition or deviation. We give a few examples taken from Ur's *Discussions that Work* (1981) which could be applied to teaching literature:

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\*\* Deconstruction is a critical viewpoint related to the connection between text and meaning. See Derrida, Jacques (1978). *Of Grammatology*, trans. By Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press.

- a) **Connections:** one group thinks of a connection between two characters, places, and so on, in different scenes; the others guess.
- b) **Interpreting pictures:** this could be based on the jacket illustrations of a book, a still from the film of the book, or a drawing made by students themselves. The task will to identify characters and events and facial expressions along with other details (Ur 1981).
- c) **Detecting differences:** someone narrates an incident in a recent studied text, making minor but significant changes. Ideally, the speaker should represent one of the characters, trying to establish an excuse for his or her behaviour or an alibi. The rest of the class cross-examine the speaker and try to prove inaccuracy or inconsistency.
- d) **Guessing games:** two students act out a dialogue loosely based on a scene in recent book, but not taken verbatim from it, and omitting names and other giveaway details; the rest of the class guess the intended book and scene.



**Figure 5:** Discussions that work (Ur 1981)

All of these types of activities can help to expand or make bigger the attentiveness of uninterested students, and can bring life as well as real learning during lectures. Yet, they

have a propensity to draw attention to factual knowledge of the text, with only partial analysis. In addition, most can be used only after a text, or quite a lot of it, has already been read and understood. In all, it is not clear what they add to students' literary comprehension.

The last game activity of this section refers to *Predictions* and *related guessing games* which is today a routine in FLT reading classes, for both literary and non-literary texts. Learners may be asked to guess what a story is going to be about, first on the basis of the title alone, then after a few paragraphs, then again at regular intervals throughout the text. The question may be general or very specific. Both teachers and learners alike more often than not give the impression to take pleasure in this, it possibly relates to a vital human need to appreciate the future. The probable benefits affect the sharp awareness of general literary conventions, closer attention to details of plot, as well as an increase in real language and in personal interest. The main barriers are that, similar to all good activities, it could be over-used and become too routine, it might also lead to an absolute focus on plot, or 'what happens next', at the expense of other interesting literary features.

A class of activities which is becoming more and more important in the teaching of literature refers, for instance, to the '*create one's own text*'. One can write a totally different original text; in the middle, there are practically infinite possibilities for adaptation, caricature, imitation, précis, translation to a new genre, i.e. novel to play for example, follow-up and so on. It can as well be an activity wherein every act of reading is the creation of text, a statement recognised by psycholinguistics and by Reader Response theory.<sup>i</sup>

In this present suggestion we are interested in reading but using creative writing as an essential means to their ends. For instance, Maley and Moulding's *Poem into Poem* (1985) could be relevant in teaching literature to non-natives as it deals with a series of topic-based units, each of which follow the same pattern (ibid: 2):

- a) First there is a section called 'Warming up'. It prepares you for the theme of the points which follow. You may be asked to do activities in connection with picture, make notes on a recorded conversation, or perhaps read a brief prose passage. These activities all involve discussion with a partner or in groups.

- b) You will listen to the first poem as you read it. This is followed by activities aimed at helping you to understand it.
- c) The same procedure follows for the second Poem (and in Unit 1 for the third and fourth Poems).
- d) A section on 'Writing' usually follows. This contains activities leading you to produce your own poems, usually in groups. This also involves discussion of your own and other groups' work.
- e) Finally there is a poem for you to read and listen to on your own, with no work attached – simply for your enjoyment. (ibid: 2)

The problem with this book is that a great number of texts are not authentic literature because they consist of songs, poems which are on the whole written by EFL teachers and other admirers of the school magazine.

Another book in this area is Bob Pope's (1995) *Textual Intervention*, which assumes much higher levels of linguistic and literary competence than does *Poem into Poem*, and seems equally suitable for native and non-native speakers. It includes both literary and non-literary texts. It starts from the principle that "*The best way to understand how a text works (...) is to change it: to play around with it, to intervene in it in some way (large or small), and then try to account for the exact effect of what you have done*" (Pope; 1995: 1).

Though briefly mentioning the literary theory of deconstruction<sup>ii</sup>, i.e. Derrida and others, Pope (Ibid: 2) suggests that 'intervention' can entail 'parallel, opposed and alternative texts'. In some suggested activities, students are asked to change a text in any way they like, in others to change specific aspects, for example genre, speaker or addressee. They may for instance; 'translate' rather formal poem into conversational tone; describe or speculate on what else was happening at the historical time of a novel.

There are, however, danger of going too far in Maley and Moulding's as well as Pope's precious desire to deprive students from a needless respect for established literature. Therefore, it is advisable to encourage learners to go back to the real thing and examine with honest minds whether it is still better, more practical, more satisfying before taking a text part.

## Conclusion

A great number of teachers reading this article will have extensive experience of teaching literature. Others will be about to embark on teaching literature for the very first time. Some teachers will feel self-assured, enthusiastically looking forward to renewing compassion with a known literary work. Their previous know-how will have provided them a stock of data on the way literature is taught to another group of students. Others will feel anxious, not confident about how to start, doubtful about how students will react. They predict the suspicions of a literary work far more obviously than its ease of understanding.

This article lends a hand to both kinds of teacher and to all others who fall between these two polars. It is wished that readers will come across a summary of the existing conditions in teaching literature, together with a number of detailed descriptions of practical approaches that have proved successful in a great number of classroom settings (see table below). The proficient teacher's skill lies in the clever and reflective change of content and method to fit the real state of affairs and the exclusive predisposition of his specific students.

## Notes:

- 1 - Parkinson and Reid Thomas, 2000: 29
- 2 -Ibid: 28-29
- 3 -Ibid: 30

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### Annexe

KINDS OF ACTIVITIES INVOLVING LITERATURE IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM		EXPLANATIONS
1	Reading for pleasure	Reading in quantity improves learners understanding
2	Reading for content	Encourages students to make wider cultural horizons as well as lessen the learners' detention in the worldview and values of their own place and time
3	Reading solely as foreign language practice	Learners study a literary text, or an extract, look up difficult words, answer questions about it, do excises on vocabulary and grammar relating to it.
4	Linguistic analysis	It involves looking very closely at the language of literary texts, including features like deviance, regularity, polysemy, and mimesis, also features of discourse organisation or narrative structure which operate over long stretches of text.
5	Personal response	Learners are asked about what books/types of books (novels, novellas, short stories, plays and poems) they hope to be trained at. They are asked how much they enjoy it. they will decide between ending or else cancelling it, reading it entirely or partially, transferring it in classroom settings or setting it on their own as assignments, putting it in writing or coming up by means of a debate, keeping on additional work of the similar nature before shifting to something entirely different
6	Games and 'fun' activities	Games can help to gain or regain the interest of apathetic students, and can bring life and real learning to otherwise 'dead' sessions at the end of a day or week. They tend to stress factual knowledge of the text, with only limited interpretation. Besides, most can be used only after a text, has already been read and understood.
7	Prediction and related activities	Prediction helps readers to activate their prior knowledge about a topic, beginning the process of combining what they know with new material in the text. Predictions are not simply wild guesses, they are based on clues within the text such as pictures, illustrations, subtitles, and plot.
8	Creating one's own text	One can write a totally different original text; in the middle, there are practically infinite possibilities for adaptation, caricature, imitation, précis, translation to a new genre, i.e. novel to play for example, follow-up and so on.

**Table 1:** What else can be done with literature? (Adapted from Parkinson and Reid Thomas, 2000: 30-39)