

Engaging Teachers in the Teaching of Children's Literature

Essential Question:



What should I know about the English Curriculum and the approaches for teaching literature?

Introduction:

An engaging children's literature or English teacher cannot but be a thoughtful teacher who understands kids and learning, and is an active, intelligent person who loves his/her work. This chapter is all about that kind of literature teacher who finds literature to be both important and necessary. This chapter will explore the salient features of the much-talked-about K to 12 Curriculum Guide in English. It will tackle pedagogical considerations that affect the teaching of literature toward providing teachers with effective research-based and strategies-based approaches to the teaching of children's literature to help build and strengthen literacy skills of school-age learners.

In this chapter, you are expected to:

- *relate the elements of the K to 12 language program into the approaches and strategies in teaching children's literature;*
- *integrate information from a wealth of research in order to gain the knowledge, skills, and attitude of an effective literature teacher; and generate creative learning outputs exemplifying the teaching strategies to get the most out of the value of teaching literature to children.*

The English Program in the K to 12 Curriculum

Learning Targets

At the end of this lesson, you are expected to:

- *describe the state of the country's English proficiency prior to the implementation of the K to 12 curriculum;*
- *explain salient features of the K to 12 English program;*
- *evaluate oneself as a language and literature teacher; and*
- *come up with innovative ways in teaching literature to Generation Z learners.*

Introduction

Studies show that improving language skills can have profound academic and social benefits for children, both in early childhood and later in life... as “[Language] emerges as a strong predictor across subject areas.” This can also be said about developing and nurturing the appreciation skills of learners of literary texts. On this basis, the first lesson in this module dwells on the English language program of the K to 12 curriculum. This lesson will provide the impetus for teachers of literature as teacher leaders to take stock of their influence and impact on their learners by integrating 21st century literacies into their classrooms.



THINK

Why K to 12?

Scores of studies provide a quick glimpse of the current state of education of the Philippines. Achievement scores in the National Achievement Test (NAT) administered by the Department of Education in SY 2011–2012, the last year of basic education in the Philippines, revealed a passing rate in English of only 66.27% for Grade 6, and an even lower passing rate of 51.80% for high school. The result proved just as dismal with the set of standardized tests addressing the major subjects taught in school with only 66.79% for Grade 6, and an even lower passing rate of 48.90% for high school. This low performance for Grade 6 in English and in the major subjects extends to even as far back as SY 2005–2006. These findings on the deterioration of the country's educational system have been perceived as one of the factors contributing to the poor academic preparation of students in college, prompting the Department of Education to adopt a K to 12 curriculum, arguing that the “K to 12

program will be the solution to the yearly basic education woes and the deteriorating quality of education.” Through the implementation of its English program over a span of 13 years of basic education along four key stages, it seeks to make learning meaningful through language via an effective Language Arts and Multiliteracies Curriculum (LAMC). Today’s generation of learners, what we call “Generation Z” or “digital natives,” are the stakeholders of the government’s educational program.

Literature Program in K to 12

Where does literature come in in the new curriculum?

Cruz (2012) offers a glimpse at the learning competencies and standards in the new curriculum to see if literature will finally be given its proper place in the education of our youth.

On the whole, the program prescribes that “after 12 years of pre-university education, a student wishing to enter college should be able to (among others):

- Analyze themes, structures, and elements of myths, traditional narratives, and classical and contemporary literature.
- Read a poem with proper pronunciation and appropriate emotion.
- Recite at least ten poems from memory.
- Identify the characters, setting, theme, conflict, and type of a work of fiction.
- Discuss literary devices, such as point of view and symbolism, used in a work of fiction.”

Competencies

Article I. A “competency” is an array of knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) required to successfully perform a specific task (Competencies and Learning Objectives, 2020). The following are competencies that are expected to be developed in the K to 12 learners:

Grades 1 to 3

Students from Grades 1 to 3 are expected to:

- Deal with simple literary elements of text such as character, plot, and setting. This would entail knowing the events that transpire in the story and identifying the problem and the solution.

Identify the characters, their individual traits and qualities from their thoughts, words, and behavior.

- Infer thoughts, feelings, and actions of characters and the reasons that justify why the character/s acted accordingly.

Make out the striking message and provide an explanation or rationale behind occurrences in the story.

Grades 7 to 10 (Junior High School)

In junior high school, the students are expected to:

Recognize literary devices and figures of speech that make writing interesting and appealing. Flashback is an example of a literary device, and simile, metaphor, sarcasm, and alliteration among others, are some examples of figures of speech.

In regard to basic literary and expository discourse (fiction and nonfiction prose and poetry), acquire and develop the effective use of rhetorical devices such as repetition, parallelism, pronouns, and cohesive devices such as induction, deduction, and climactic order as crucial aspects of writing.

Scrutinize portions of the literary text that are faithful to, or takes lightly, the practice in the creation of literary works.

- Critique or analyze a text or reading selection in a way that is structured, organized, and objective and that can stand on its own merits.

Grades 11 to 12 (Senior High School)

The senior high school core curriculum covers 21st century literature from the Philippines and the world. The following are the expected competencies:

- Identify the geographic, linguistic, and ethnic dimensions of Philippine literary history from precolonial to the contemporary.
- Identify representative texts and authors from each region (e.g., engage in oral history research with focus on key personalities from the students' region/province/town).
- Value the contributions of local writers to the development of regional literary traditions.
- Appreciate the contributions of the canonical Filipino writers to the development of national literature.
- Differentiate/Compare and contrast the various 21st century literary genres and the ones from the earlier genres/periods citing their elements, structures, and traditions.
- Infer literary meaning from literal language based on usage.
- Analyze the figures of speech and other literary techniques and devices in the text.
- Explain the literary, biographical, linguistic, and sociocultural contexts and discuss how they enhance the text's meaning and enrich the reader's understanding.
- Situate the text in the context of the region and the nation.
- Explain the relationship of context with the text's meaning.
- Produce a creative representation of a literary text by applying multimedia skills; choose an appropriate multimedia format in interpreting a literary text.

Apply Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills in crafting an adaptation of a literary text.

- Do self- and/or peer-assessment of the creative adaptation of a literary text, based on rationalized criteria, prior to presentation.

It is very encouraging that, in the present K to 12 program, literature has been given importance and prominence alongside the learning of English. Unlike in the past, literature at this point is viewed as a catalyst toward achieving the primary goal of basic education in developing a holistic Filipino equipped with 21st century skills that would make him/her locally, regionally, and globally competitive. Literature, Cruz (2012) avers, is effective in achieving the skills expected of, and from, a 21st century learner and professional.



EXPERIENCE

Look for editorials and columns in some daily newspapers, including your university or college papers, that relate to the K to 12 curriculum. Read and extract the articles that you have downloaded and fill out the T-diagram below by writing the strengths and criticisms of the K to 12 curriculum in the Philippines.

Strengths	Criticisms



ASSESS

Try to recall the features of the K to 12 curriculum and the context that your future Gen Z learners will experience. Come on, answer the following questions briefly.

- What advancements in technology bombard the Generation Z learners? Give as many examples.

Pedagogical Implications for Teaching Literature

Learning Targets

At the end of this lesson, you are expected to:

- *discuss pedagogical implications for teaching literature;*
- *explain children's literature and some pedagogical implications; and*
- *innovate ways to teach and learn literature.*

Introduction

In an environment where change is inevitable, teachers need to prepare themselves for this phenomenon. The key to this is pedagogy, so teachers need to make corresponding changes in the emphasis and pedagogy in their teaching to achieve the objectives of both teachers and learners. The pedagogy adopted by teachers shapes their actions, judgments, and other teaching strategies while taking into consideration theories of learning, understandings of students and their needs, and the backgrounds and interests of individual students. This lesson will focus on pedagogical implications and considerations that will be helpful for teaching literature to improve the learners' capacity to understand, learn from, and above all, enjoy literary works.



THINK

Long (1986) points out that the teaching of literature can be a dull, uninteresting, and boring thing to do unless there is a response or a reaction from the learners, be it positive or negative, adding that even a negative response can stir life and learning in the classroom where learners get the feel of challenging the teacher's often predictable responses.

In an earlier discourse, Rosenblatt (1985) underscored that the reading of a particular literary work cannot but be the unique experience of a particular reader with a unique range of emotions over a particular text under a unique reading situation. She labels this as "a transaction with the literary text." This being the case, she espoused, along with Long and Carter and Tudor, that, in teaching literature, the students should be encouraged to express what they think about the text and discover for themselves how the text relates

to themselves. This, Rosenblatt believes, would nurture, and develop, in the learner the “continuous love, enjoyment, and appreciation of literary texts” while at the same time develop in due course both his/her language proficiency and literary aptitude.

What then are the pedagogical implications for teaching literature? The answer to this is to know what children’s literature is.

Children’s literature, according to Otten (2003), is the product of the figment of imagination in the writer’s mind borne out of how one interacts with children and how the writer makes a construct of childhood. According to Laffrado (1995) (Introduction to Children’s..., 2012), children’s literature comprises a wide variety of writing for readers whose ages range from very young kids (like toddlers) to adolescents (teenagers) approaching maturity and adulthood. The main genres include the following:

- **Picture books** appeal to the sense of sight to provide a delightful visual experience to the reader through pictures to tell a story.
- **Storybooks** tell a story accompanied by pictures and illustrations where there is more text than pictures.
- **Traditional literature** refers to literature or books that are passed from one generation to another like folklore, fables, legends, folktales, and myths. These are referred to as *alamat* in the Philippine context and are generally rich in culture of that place and time.

Historical fiction pertains to literary text where some facts in the story can be traced to real historical events involving some real historical individuals, allowing children to take a trip back in time. Some events in the story however are a product of the writer’s inventiveness, imagination, and creativity.

Modern fantasy refers to tales born out of the writer’s imagination where fantastic elements such as talking animals, and magical beings like witches and strange creatures are woven in the story.

Realistic fiction refers to made-up stories but which can be true in real-life. Children play as the main characters thereby allowing children to feel or go through an experience as if it were true.

Nonfiction or informational books present young readers information to help them develop more knowledge about the world around them. They can dwell on any topic or information (science, travel, life skills, new outlook) about life that would interest young minds.

Biography pertains to the true life story about another person like heroes or ordinary people whose lives may serve as an inspiration for children to emulate and follow.

Children’s poetry pertains to artistic literature that seeks to bring out the creativity in children by enabling them to express their emotions and stir their imagination through verses and the interplay of rhyme, rhythm, and other literary expressions.

Children's drama is a genre of literature where the elements of a story are presented through dialogue and action and makes use of costumes, props, lighting, music, and sound. This literary presentation develops in children acting abilities, public speaking skills, creative thinking, and social skills among others.

As the purpose of literature is to entice, motivate, and instruct, it opens opportunities for learners to see new horizons and have an abundance of fun and delight in reading and learning literature. This is quite possible for, according to Norton and Norton (2010), literature offers limitless benefits for young people.' For one, literature provides learners the chance to respond accordingly and appropriately to literature and to cultivate their own thoughts about the subject matter. Second, literature makes it possible for students to develop appreciation of their own culture and others. Third, literature develops in students emotional strength, stability, and steadfastness as well as resourcefulness and ingenuity. Fourth, literature promotes social maturity and helps develop social development. Finally, literature and its books promote and preserve a people's cultural and literary heritage from generation to generation.

What makes children's literature apart from adult literature? Children's literature is a class on its own, with its own brand of writing style and characteristics that set it apart from adult literature. Children's literature is simple, naïve, unsophisticated, natural, and uncomplicated. It dwells on the present, on the here and now of everyday problems and difficulties that beset man. It echoes the feelings, moods, sensitivities, and experiences of children today and expresses these from the standpoint and attitude of a child. Children's literature is adorned with illustrations such as pictures, graphics, designs, and images that appeal to the mind of a child. Deliberate repetition of words and ideas are used to enable recall and recognition. It avoids and steers away from adult themes to make it child friendly and appropriate. To dispel boredom, it is often action-packed and is inclined to dwell on fantasy, fancy, imagination, and castle-in-the-sky hopes and dreams. Certainly, children's literature is out to teach a moral or a lesson, making it instructional and educational. Finally, more often than not, the ending of the story is happy (Introduction to Children's Literature).

What then is pedagogy? Pedagogy, according to Peel (Pedagogy, n.d.), is all about the methods a teacher uses to achieve one's objectives to ensure that students are engaged in age-appropriate learning activities vis-à-vis the teacher's expertise in using different methods. Larcher ("What are Literature-Based...", n.d.) points out several literature-based teaching strategies using authors' original works to serve as the heart of experiences to help children develop literacy. These general strategies include the following:

Scaffold Instruction – Students are given a lot of structures at the beginning, and these structures are removed little by little until the students are capable of doing it themselves.

Modeling – While reading or discussing a literary work, the teacher thinks out loud his thoughts related to the text.

Cooperative Learning – Students work together in small groups and engage in tasks that involve risks and higher level thinking skills instead of the conventional question-answer teaching strategy.

Independent Reading – This is done to promote reading, writing, and thinking skills which are the goals of education.

Literary Response – Students act in response to what they read.

Section 1.13 In addition, there are strategies that teach students text comprehension like monitoring comprehension; metacognition or having control over their reading before, during, and after reading; graphic and semantic organizers; answering questions and generating questions; recognizing story structure; and summarizing. Teachers can also engage in competitive games, writing activities, journal entries, and group activities. Today, teachers also form literature circles (like book clubs), where students gather together into a small group to discuss a piece of literature, with each student having a specific role. Choral readings likewise provide a great opportunity for full-class participation, a venue that is most welcome for shy and introverted students to participate. Through readers' theatre, students are similarly given the chance to perform on stage, complete with dramatic readings, costumes, and creativity.

Section 1.14 Whatever the pedagogy or strategy, it is best to remember to heed however the advice of our National Artist F. Sionil José: “First, don't make literature difficult. Do not torture your students with too much mind-bending tests. Make literature interesting; enjoyable.”

Section 1.15 Hence, if literature, according to Rosenblatt (1978), is to be experienced as a transactional process, the interaction between the teacher and the learners should be a meaningful collaboration toward eliciting response to the text and guiding the learners to a personal discovery, nurturing in them the continuous love, enjoyment, and appreciation of literary texts.



EXPERIENCE

1. Did any of your teachers in grade school teach you how to read literature when you were a child? If so, how? How did this affect your appreciation of literature?

Approaches in Teaching Literature

Learning Targets

At the end of this lesson, you are expected to:

- differentiate the three approaches for teaching literature;
- develop understanding and appreciation of the approaches; and
- engage in activities contextualized to a particular approach.

Introduction

Approach, according to the MacMillan dictionary, is the “particular way of thinking about or dealing with something.” Thus, in the context of teaching literature, approach would mean the best way or the best practice a teacher uses to teach literature to learners in the classroom in order to achieve his/her goal of imparting relevant and meaningful knowledge to the learner. Moody (1983) refers to this as an operational framework applicable to realities on the ground in the classroom.

Aim and approach go hand-in-hand in teaching. If one has clear-cut aims in terms of the lesson per se and expectations from the learner, the decision on what approach to tackle that will suit the needs of the learners and make learning of great value and interest will come easy. This lesson will focus on the approaches employed and challenges encountered in the teaching of literature toward successfully accomplishing its objectives and not a mere futile exercise.



THINK

The teaching of literature can be achieved using one, or a combination, of three approaches namely: **traditional approach**, **language-based approach**, and **reader-response approach**. An understanding of each approach is essential.

Traditional Approach

The teaching of literature in our schools has become mainly lecture-based with the conventionally used traditional teacher-centered approach. Many of us must be familiar with this approach where the teacher spells out important terms and concepts as a necessary part

of the discussion (Pugh, 1988), and the student has no choice but to listen and regurgitate what the teacher says (Rashid et al., 2010). In this classroom setting, the teacher provides background information like the social, political, and historical background to a text. He/She also explains some thematic and stylistic features of the text (or other literary genres). The learners, on the other hand, have only a few opportunities to do the task by themselves and formulate their feelings and responses about the reading text, which tends to make this approach quite teacher-centered. As a consequence, the student becomes parrot-like, merely repeating what has been presented in class. Miliani (2003:2) states “thus, the course (of literature) becomes a simple transposition of the teacher’s impressions and feelings to the learner toward a literary work, and not an intellectual exercise for the latter who should seek and discover meaning by himself with the means and strategies provided by the teacher.”

A typical classroom scene would find the teacher dishing out the lecture and providing students with background information and explaining the content of the text to the class as the teacher reads notes from workbooks and handouts. Time and again, the teacher elicits information from students about the text by asking comprehension questions or letting the students do some exercises to check their knowledge based on what they have read.

Generally speaking, this approach does not consider the learner too much. Learners, thus, read a large number of literary works, but whether or not their capabilities of assimilating, appreciating, and analyzing are developed and nurtured, is questionable.

Language-Based Approach

As it became vital to look for a more effective approach to teaching literature that would help learners interact profoundly with literary texts and other genres as well as reconsider the teacher’s role, a language-based approach seemed to be the appropriate option. Miliani (2003:2) affirms “literature rarely seems like an opportunity for language use, hence, the need for a language-based approach to the teaching of literary texts to develop knowledge OF literature not ABOUT literature.” Arab (1993:135) also affirms, “this is why the language-based approach, which not only softens the sudden exposure to marked texts but also extends the students’ word repertory, as well as reading and writing skill, seems to be the most appropriate.”

In this approach, the student’s attention is focused on the way language is used in the literary texts, drawing the attention of the learner to various aspects of the target language like grammar and vocabulary among others, thereby either improving, increasing, or enhancing his awareness of the language. This is what Maley and Duff (1990) surmise as the primary aim of this approach, that is, to engage learners in language activities via literary texts.

It becomes obvious that, in the language-based approach, the learner manipulates the language alongside learning literature. We see here running parallel the goals of both

language learning and literature learning. The learner is seen engaged in varied language activities such as jigsaw puzzle, fill-in-the-blank exercises, organizing sentences, creative thinking and writing, as well as performance activities like drama and poetry recital. All of these are done with the intention of using the various aspects of a language as a means to teaching literature through what is called as deconstruction. This is proffered by Savvidou (2004), who asserts this approach as using literary text as a means for linguistic practice and literature as the source of language activities.

In fact, even as early as 1991, McRae (1991) and McRae and Vethamani (1999) were already espousing a language-based framework or context that would progress accordingly from vocabulary (usage and diction) to sentence (basic elements of effective writing) to discourse (expanded discussion of thought). This framework is also expected to give attention to sounds, visual impact of the text, meaning, dialect or variations of standard English, language registers, archaisms or evolution of a language, and function of language. By doing this, those advocating such framework are convinced that the learners would be benefitted doubly in terms of learning both language and literature meaningfully and consequentially.

Reader-Response Approach

Rosenblatt (1978) is said to be the best known theorist who espoused the reader-response approach. In her “transactional theory,” she distinguishes clearly between utilitarian reading and aesthetic reading, the former referring to reading for a purpose and the latter referring to reading for pleasure and appreciation. In the latter, we find the reader engaged in a deeper level of interaction of transaction in reading a literary text as he responds to the text through an interplay of his thoughts and way of thinking, feelings and emotions, judgment and reasoning, and biases and prejudices among others. We find both parties in the transaction mutually affecting each other, where a symbiotic effect occurs between the text and reader. This is echoed by Parsons (1978), as cited by Pugh (1988), referring to this as “the meeting of two meaning makers over literature...[which]...produces changes in both, the author’s text and the reader’s growth.” It is to be understood that this process seeks not to control the reader’s experience but rather to facilitate the reader’s own structuring of that experience.

Consequently we find in this approach the writer and the text producing a cathartic effect on the reader as his/her personal life experiences come to the fore and become enriched by way of his/her response to what he/she is reading, even to the point of claiming ownership of the text as it relates to his/her life (Hirvela, 1996). This synergy, Rosli (1995) claims, drives, and impels a learner to read as he/she finds meaning in what he/she reads. This approach, rich in student-centered activities, draws out from the learner his/her varied responses while at the same time promotes his/her personal development and growth. These activities include individual tasks like personal writing and journal writing along with collaborative tasks like brainstorming sessions and small-group discussions.

From the foregoing, we recognize that the learner's response and reaction to the literary text takes precedence over knowledge (Pugh, 1988). In a similar fashion, Khatib (2011) reiterates this sentiment saying that the personal approach develops in the learner an open mind and a willingness to learn far beyond the mere improvement of his/her language proficiency while, at the same time, making him/her a better and more skilled reader in the process. Diyanni, 2000; Kirszner and Mandell, 2001; Padley, 2006; Tyson, 2006 (Journal of Language..., 2011) affirm this view which is similarly in accord with psychologists who likewise regard the personal response approach as a potent and powerful way of teaching literature and optimizing learning. By allowing the active participation of students and their full engagement in reading a text and class discussion, this approach vests upon those teaching literature the indisputable power that literature can have in positively affecting the lives of students even beyond the classroom.



EXPERIENCE

As a pair, answer the questions below. Share and compare your answers.

Why do we need to have literature specifically written for children? What kind of literary experiences did you enjoy as a child? Which of the three approaches do you remember your teachers taught you that you liked best?
