

# **Teaching Language through Literature**

## **Reflective Commentary**

**Alina Ioana Morar**

## **Assignment 3: Reflective Commentary of the Lesson Plan**

### **3.1 Context**

This paper will focus on teaching Language through literature at a Romanian University. This module is mandatory for 1<sup>st</sup> year undergraduate students that study Humanities through the Language and Literature department, English – German section. Even if this course is bilingual, this is an English major class, therefore its sessions are taught in English. It must be mentioned that the level of this module is Upper-Intermediate. The aim of this module is to teach English language by using the literary texts as a teaching tool

### **3.2 The literary text**

Since everything about literature represents an interest nowadays, this session aims to look past the canonic literature and develop a discussion based on a post-modern historical fiction novel. The chosen literary texts for this teaching session are excerpts from Marcus Zusak's novel, *The Book Thief* (2005). Choosing materials to teach language through literature in an EFL classroom may represent a challenge for the teachers who design their own materials; They have to be aware of many facts, for instance, to stick with the main focus: aim to teach language through a literary text, not to teach the literary features of that text. Another possible challenges that teachers must be aware of are the following: students' level, the difficulty and the length of the texts, the cultural meaning, the appropriateness for the students' group. Research shows that using novels in an EFL classroom has a positive impact on students because “novels can motivate them, enrich their cultural knowledge, and improve their language ability” (Siaj & Farrah 2018 :44).

Based on research, it can be argued that the chosen novel may be efficient to teach language in the EFL classroom; for instance, learners can learn new language features in a specific context and it can be motivational and engaging because the student may have seen the movie adaptation of the book. Also, the chosen novel portraits historical fiction which may represent an intellectual challenge for the learners as it refers to actual historical data; this novel also requires emotional involvement as the main topic is about the World War II and about Holocaust. This topic may represent a cultural awareness for the language classroom teachers should be able to apply criteria that include linguistic, literary, educational and cultural aspects in choosing a text for their class (Narančić-Kovać & Kaltenbacher 2006). On the other hand, teaching this theme in this specific

context may be more interesting for the Romanian students because they have the background knowledge for the historical facts of this topic; Romanian students have a history mandatory subject in the senior year of high school that studies the WW2 history for an entire semester.

Scholars state that the use of literary texts provides more than authentic materials for the L2 learners, it also promotes the understanding of the target culture. There are many advantages in using literary texts in language learning because it provides many opportunities for the learners to practice all language skills. Therefore, it can be argued that “literature is an ideal vehicle to portray culture, so people increase their understanding of others who are different from themselves through literature thus people develop tolerance for other cultures” (Mart 2006). Teaching language through historical fiction provides teachers opportunities to choose their materials from a wide range of fascinating sources that are suitable for all proficiency levels. For instance, the chosen novel for the lesson plan may be suitable for upper-intermediate learners since it has a complex figurative language and it illustrates historical events. Research shows that literature increases personal response by allowing the readers to fill their culturally gaps with their imagination. Moreover, scholars state that historical fiction “alludes to the social, political, and economic conditions in which characters are placed” (Shin 2018).

This novel brings an amount of advantages to the language session because it portraits more than historical fiction based in the time of World War 2, Holocaust and dictatorship; “*The Book Thief*” (Zusak 2005) displays the power of words, the beauty of figurative language and most important, it pays a tribute to people’s heroic efforts, to survivors and to the complexity of the history of that era, “as literature is a carrier of culture and cultural perspectives, developing cultural awareness is another legitimate goal” (Narančić-Kovać & Kaltenbacher 2006 :84). The novel provides learners personal growth and knowledge about both culture and history.

### **3.3 Teaching stages**

The aim of this lesson is to provide learners opportunities to practice their understanding of the features of the figurative language in Zusak’s novel. It must be mentioned that this novel may be used as a material for the entire unit. The objectives of this lesson are the following: at the end of this lesson, students will have practiced all language skills, they will have been introduced to the figurative language features and they will have an understanding of the concept of figurative

language. Moreover, this language session is designed based on the Communicative Approach and the tasks provides learners opportunities to practice their language skills and to produce new vocabulary. Also, in order to meet the framework for teaching language through literature, this lesson is based on the Integrated Approach and it follows three phases: language consideration (i.e. students have read the novel at home during their spring break and they were provided a vocabulary list and the cultural background), cultural consideration (i.e. this lesson provides necessary background in pre-teaching stages) and enrichment consideration (i.e. this lesson includes a writing activity as a post-teaching task).

On the other hand, this lesson includes authentic materials and provides learners their autonomy. In order to involve every student in the discussions, the teacher will provide active feedback at the end of every activity. Research shows that authentic materials in the EFL classroom may be beneficial for L2 learners because it provides examples of functional language, it gives students' confidence and it encourages personal response (Gower, Philips & Walters 2005).

## **Stage 1**

This stage of the teaching session represents the pre-teaching tasks and the lead-in activities which aim to engage the learners with the topic, to activate the schemata and to check students' background knowledge. The first task of this lesson involves a warm-up activity which aims to encourage students' prediction about the topic. Through this activity, students will practice their speaking skills by working in groups of four and discussing possible answers for the questions; in the first part of exercise 1 (Appendix 2), learners have to provide a possible definition for the concept of figurative language, then, in the second part, they have to read a short passage from the novel and figure out the real meaning of the colors. The second activity of this stage aims to introduce the discussion to the learners; through this activity students will practice their listening skills by watching a short video in order to find the missing words from exercise 2 (Appendix 2).

## **Stage 2**

The second stage of this session provides learners an opportunity to practice their reading skills. Through this activity, students have to read the text in exercise 3 (Appendix 2) and find an interpretation for the sentences. Moving on exercise 4, learners have to find a meaning for the quote written in bold from the prior task. During this activity L2 learners practice their noticing,

their skimming and scanning abilities and their reading skills by paying attention on particular language items.

### **Stage 3**

The last activity on this session involves a post-teaching stage and it engages the learners in a follow-on exercise (i.e. enrichment consideration phase) that aims to consolidate new information. This activity encourages students to practice their writing skills, to produce new language and to provide personal responses. At this stage of the session, students have to provide personal response by writing a short letter to the main character of the book (i.e. Liesel- the book thief); students have to use figurative language in their letters and to share their beliefs about reading literature.

Based on the information mentioned above, it can be argued that this lesson plan has features of different methodological approaches (i.e. integrated approach, language approach, cultural approach and personal growth approach) because it includes both collective and individual learning activities, it is authentic and creative, it involves the practice of the language skills and it aims to engage the learners with the text and its meaning.

### **3.4 The effectiveness of literary texts as teaching tools in the EFL classroom**

Based on research, literary texts may have an advantage over a textbook piece of material because students should interact with authentic texts that are relevant for language acquisition (Chen & Squires 2011). Zusak's novel may be more efficient than a textbook handout (in language teaching) because it cultural and historical content. Scholars state that "literature expands language awareness and offers an opportunity to use a foreign language in a meaningful context" (Narančić-Kovać & Kaltenbacher 2006 :85). Literature can offer "means of learning" for EFL learners because it provides them opportunities to practice more than their language skills, for instance, they can develop their fluency and their accuracy in the target language (Mart 2006).

As a final observation, it can be argued that this lesson and the chosen material may be useful for language and content because it is authentic and engaging for learners.

## **References:**

- Carter, R. & Long, M.N. (1991) *Teaching Literature*. Harlow : Longman
- Chen, M. & Squires, D. (2011) "Using Literature For Children And Adolescents For Intermediate Language Acquisition". *TESOL Journal* 2 (3), 312-329
- Gower, R., Philips, D. and Walters S. (2005) *Teaching Practice A Handbook for Teachers in Training*, London: Macmillan Education
- Mart, C. T. (2016) "The Use of Literature in Language Teaching". *Journal of Educational and Instructional Studies in the World* 6 (2), 77-83.
- Narančić-Kovać, S. & Kaltenbacher, M (2006) "Promoting Intercultural Awareness through Literature in Foreign Language Teacher Education". In Fenner, A. and Newby, D. (Eds.) *Coherence Of Principles, Cohesion Of Competences*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe
- Shin, J. (2018) "The Use Of Historical Fiction In The Language Classroom: A Pedagogical Proposal For Teachers Of English". *TESOL Journal* 10 (1), e00381
- Siaj, R. & Farrah, M. (2018) "Using Novels in the Language Classroom at Hebron University". *Journal of Creative Practices in Language Learning and Teaching (CPLT)* 6. 44-59
- Zusak, M. (2005) *The Book Thief*. Pan Macmillan Australia

**(Appendix 1)**

**“The book thief” by M. Zusak - Lesson Plan**

**Main Topic: Figurative Language**

**Aim:** At the end of this lesson the learners will have been exposed to figurative language.

**Objectives:**

**At the end of this lesson the learners will:**

- 1. have been introduced to the concept of figurative language**
- 2. have an understanding of the use of figurative language**
- 3. have practiced each language skill (speaking, listening, reading, writing)**

**Primary Skills: Reading**

**Secondary Skills: Speaking, Listening, Writing**

**Class level: B2 (Upper-Intermediate)**

**Length of the lesson: 50 minutes**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Stage / activity</b>	<b>What you will do</b>	<b>Why you'll do it</b>	<b>What the Ls will do</b>	<b>Interaction</b>
0-5	<i>Pre-Teaching/ Ice-breaker</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• T will ask Ls get into groups of four</li> <li>• T will ask Ls to have at the first exercise on the handout (Appendix 2) and discuss in groups the following:             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What do you understand by figurative language?</li> <li>2. What is the meaning of the colors in the provided excerpt?</li> </ol> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To activate the schemata</li> <li>• To engage Ls with the topic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ls will work in groups</li> <li>• Ls will answer the questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• T-Ls</li> <li>• Ls-Ls</li> </ul>
5-8	Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• T will check the answers from each group to check the meaning.</li> <li>• T will provide extra explanations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To involve all Ls in the lesson</li> <li>• To provide speaking activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every group will chose a spoke person that will share the group beliefs with the class</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• T-Ls</li> <li>• Ls-Ls</li> </ul>
8-15	Introduce the discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• T will ask the student to have a look at exercise number two</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To provide student-centered activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ls will watch a short video</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• T-Ls</li> <li>• Ls – Ls</li> <li>• Ls - T</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>T will play the YouTube video from minute 2:10 to 3:02. The link for the video: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NvlQEfGHZ6o">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NvlQEfGHZ6o</a></li> <li>T will ask the students to watch a short video and try to fill in the missing words</li> <li>T will ask the students to find a meaning for the sentences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To check Ls comprehension</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ls will fill in the missing words</li> <li>Ls will discuss the meaning of the words</li> </ul>	
15-18	Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>T will ask every group to provide their answers</li> <li>T will provide a clear interpretation for the meaning of the words</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To increase STT</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ls will provide answers</li> <li>Each group will check their answers with the group behind them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ls – T</li> <li>T - Ls</li> </ul>
18-35	<i>While-teaching/</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>T will ask the students to work in pairs</li> <li>T will ask every pair to read the paragraph and answer the questions from exercise 3.</li> <li>T will monitor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To increase STT</li> <li>To develop Ls skimming and scanning abilities</li> <li>To practice noticing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ls will get into their pairs.</li> <li>Ls will read the paragraph</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>T – Ls</li> <li>Ls- Ls</li> </ul>

35-40		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• T will ask the student to work in groups</li> <li>• T will ask each group to go back to the paragraph and find a meaning for the sentence written in <b>bold</b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To increase STT</li> <li>• To provide personal response</li> <li>• To practice top-down reading</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ls will read the sample</li> <li>• Ls will find the key elements of the task</li> <li>• Ls will share the answers with their peers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• T – Ls</li> <li>• Ls - Ls</li> </ul>
40-42	Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• T will ask groups to share their answers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To increase STT</li> <li>• To encourage personal response</li> <li>• To provide interaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ls will deliver answers for teachers' questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ls – T</li> <li>• T - Ls</li> </ul>
42-50	<i>Post-Teaching</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• T will ask Ls to have a look at the final exercise</li> <li>• T will ask Ls to do this task individually. Ls have to write a short letter (5-6 lines) “to the book thief”. They have to use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To encourage personal response</li> <li>• To personalise the topic and the language productions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ls will write a short letter</li> <li>• Ls will produce figurative language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• T-Ls</li> <li>• Ls-T</li> </ul>

		<p>figurative language to describe their opinion about reading literature.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• T will ask the class randomly to share their samples with the class</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ls will share their letter sample with the rest of the class</li></ul>	
--	--	--	--	--	--

## **Appendix 2**

This appendix include the handout for the lesson.

**1. Answers the following question:**

What do you understand by figurative language?

**Read the following text:**

“People observe the colors of a day only at its beginnings and ends, but to me it's quite clear that a day merges through a multitude of shades and intonations with each passing moment. A single hour can consist of thousands of different colors. Waxy yellows, cloud-spot blues. Murky darkness. In my line of work, I make it a point to notice them.” (Zusak 2005 :14)

**What is the meaning of the colors ?**

**2. Watch the video and fill in the missing words:**

- If your ..... could speak, what would they say?
- You've kept me .....
- When life ..... you, sometimes you have to .... it back
- Words are ..... and those ..... are for you to .....

**Try to provide an interpretation for every sentence.**

**3. Read the following paragraph and find a meaning for the following sentences:**

- eyes hanging on to her
- a voice played the notes inside her
- the sound of the turning page carved them in half
- stealing a glimpse of the sky
- sirens leaked into the cellar

“By page three, everyone was silent but Liesel. She didn’t dare to look up, but she could feel their frightened eyes hanging on to her as she hauled the words in and breathed them out. A voice played the notes inside her. This, it said, is your accordion. The sound of the turning page carved them in half. Liesel read on. For at least twenty minutes, she handed out the story. The youngest kids were soothed by her voice, and everyone else saw visions of the whistler running from the crime scene. Liesel did not. The book thief saw only the mechanics of the words—their bodies stranded on the paper, beaten down for her to walk on. Somewhere, too, in the gaps between a period and the next capital letter, there was also Max. She remembered reading to him when he was sick. Is he in the basement? she wondered. Or is he stealing a glimpse of the sky again?

**A NICE THOUGHT - One was a book thief. The other stole the sky.** Everyone waited for the ground to shake. That was still an immutable fact, but at least they were distracted now, by the girl with the book. One of the younger boys contemplated crying again, but Liesel stopped at that moment and imitated her papa, or even Rudy for that matter. She winked at him and resumed. Only when the sirens leaked into the cellar again did someone interrupt her. “We’re safe,” said Mr. Jenson. “Shhh!” said Frau Holtzapfel. Liesel looked up. “There are only two paragraphs till the end of the chapter,” she said, and she continued reading with no fanfare or added speed. Just the words.” (Zusak 2005 :381-382)

**4. Discuss in your groups and try to find a meaning for the words written in bold in exercise 3.**

**5. Write a short letter to the “book thief” (approx. 10-12 lines) and try to use figurative language to describe your opinion about reading literature.**

## (Appendix 3)

This appendix includes the literary extracts from the novel (*The Book Thief* by Marcus Zusak).

Exercise 1:

THE BOOK THIEF

Of course, an introduction.  
A beginning.  
Where are my manners?  
I could introduce myself properly, but it's not really necessary. You will know me well enough and soon enough, depending on a diverse range of variables. It suffices to say that at some point in time, I will be standing over you, as genially as possible. Your soul will be in my arms. A colour will be perched on my shoulder. I will carry you gently away.

At that moment, you will be lying there (I rarely find people standing up). You will be caked in your own body. There might be a discovery; a scream will dribble down the air. The only sound I'll hear after that will be my own breathing, and the sound of the smell, of my footsteps.

The question is, what colour will everything be at that moment when I come for you? What will the sky be saying?

Personally, I like a chocolate-coloured sky. Dark, dark chocolate. People say it suits me. I do, however, try to enjoy every colour I see – the whole spectrum. A billion or so flavours, none of them quite the same, and a sky to slowly suck on. It takes the edge off the stress. It helps me relax.

*A SMALL THEORY*

People observe the colours of a day only at its beginnings and ends, but to me it's quite clear that a day merges through a multitude of shades and intonations, with each passing moment. A single *hour* can consist of thousands of different colours. Waxy yellows, cloud-spat blues. Murky darknesses. In my line of work, I make it a point to notice them.

\* 14 \*

### Exercise 3:



