

## Teaching English through literature

Научный руководитель – Гурбанова Огулджерен Нурыевна

*Kurbanova Myahri Begenchewna*

*Graduate (specialist)*

Туркменский государственный университет имени Махтумкули, Ашхабад, Туркменистан

*E-mail: shelbykuba@gmail.com*

Nowadays great attention is paid to the study of foreign languages, English, in particular, as English is a chief medium of communication all over the world and the use of English is the accepted lingua franca.

One of the methods of making English classes more effective and interesting is use of literature in the ELT classroom. This method is being widely used for a number of reasons. Having formed a part of traditional language teaching approaches, literature became less popular when language teaching and learning started to focus on the functional use of language. However, the role of literature in the ELT classroom has been re-assessed and many now view literary texts as providing rich linguistic input, effective stimuli for students to express themselves in other languages and a potential source of learner motivation.

John McRae [McRae: 25] distinguishes between literature with a capital “L” - the classical texts, e.g. Shakespeare, Dickens - and literature with a small “l”, which refers to popular fiction, fables and song lyrics. The literature used in ELT classrooms today includes the work of writers from a diverse range of countries and cultures using different forms of English. Literary texts can be studied in their original forms or in simplified or abridged versions. An increasing number of stories in English are written specifically for learners of other languages. Literary texts provide opportunities for multi-sensorial classroom experiences and can appeal to learners with different learning styles. Texts can be supplemented by audio-texts, music CDs, film clips, podcasts, all of which enhance even further the richness of the sensory input that students receive. Literary texts offer a rich source of linguistic input and can help learners to practice the four skills - speaking, listening, reading and writing - in addition to exemplifying grammatical structures and presenting new vocabulary. Literature can help learners to develop their understanding of other cultures, awareness of ‘difference’ and to develop tolerance and understanding. At the same time literary texts can deal with universal themes such as friendship, war and loss that are not always covered in the course books. Literary texts are representational rather than referential [McRae: 28]. Referential language communicates at only one level and tends to be informational. The representational language of literary texts involves the learners and engages their emotions, as well as their cognitive faculties. Literary works help learners to use their imagination, enhance their empathy for others and lead them to develop their own creativity. They also give students the chance to learn about literary devices that occur in other genres e.g. advertising. Literature lessons can lead to public displays of student output through posters of student creations e.g. poems, stories or through performances of plays. So, for a variety of linguistic, cultural and personal growth reasons, literary texts can be more motivating than the referential ones often used in classrooms.

Teachers can exploit literary texts in a large number of ways in the classroom. Classroom work with literary works may involve pre-reading tasks, interactive work on the text and follow up activities. Pulverness [Pulverness: 14] provides some useful advice:

- Maximise pre-reading support: teachers can introduce the topic or theme of the text, pre-teach essential vocabulary items and use prediction tasks to arouse the interest and curiosity of students.

- Minimise the extent to which the teacher disturbs students' reading.
- Draw attention to stylistic peculiarity: help students to appreciate the ways that writers use language to achieve particular effects.
- Provide frameworks for creative response.
- Invite learners to step into the shoes of the writer or invite them to modify, extend or add to a text.

Literature helps students acquire a native-like competence in English, express their ideas in good English, learn the features of modern English, learn how the English linguistic system is used for communication, see how idiomatic expressions are used, speak clearly, precisely, and concisely, and become more proficient in English, as well as become creative, critical, and analytical learners. Literature is not only a tool for developing the written and oral skills of the students in the target language but also is a window opening into the culture of the target language, building up a cultural competence in students.

### References

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