

## TEACHING POETRY TO YOUNG LEARNERS: WHY AND HOW?

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### ABSTRACT

While reading poetry, readers encounter new combinations of words, words that denote as well as connote and in order to understand it, the readers must go far beyond the information given in order to make cognitive or emotive meaning out of it. Also, poetry proves to be effective in enhancing reading skills in young children. The rhyming patterns and lyrical quality in poetry provides cues to a reader for predicting words and phrases. Poetry calls for interesting post-reading activities than can engage young learners in meaningful ways of expressing themselves through writing. This paper is an attempt to discuss the ways in which teaching poetry can help in affective, cognitive and literacy development of young learners and to suggest steps towards harnessing its potential in the classroom.

**KEYWORDS:** Poetry, Reader Response, Reading Comprehension, Writing

### INTRODUCTION

Poetry is the most ancient form of literature. Poetry stirs emotion and stimulates mind through its metrical rhythms, musical lines and its sense impressions and language. In a language classroom poetry reinforces word sounds, rhymes, patterns and pronunciation. It introduces to new vocabulary and figurative language as well as examples of synonyms, antonyms, puns, word play and coining of new words and expressions. It also provides practice for language development, listening and oral fluency.

Due to peculiar use of language in poetry, the words evoke, generate and help in associating the images created by them with one's own experiences. Words in poetry are not limited to lexical definitions and referential meanings. They carry plurality of meanings from their contexts, the various associations along with sensory qualities.

Poetry makes us aware of some idea or insight, evokes some lost emotion, and brings to mind significance of some detail. D.H. Lawrence (1931) claimed that "The essential quality of poetry is that it makes a new effort in attention and 'discovers' a new world within the known world."

### POETRY FOR COGNITIVE ENHANCEMENT

Since poetry makes use of elliptical writing, readers of poetry may find its language difficult to comprehend. In an essay titled "On Difficulty", George Steiner (1978) presents a classification of various barriers to comprehension of poems. He proposes four distinct categories of problems to be addressed when dealing with a poem and shows that meaning is not immediately understood.

These categories are: *contingent*, a lack of understanding of the vocabulary of the poem; *modal*, a disparity between the poet's and the reader's frame of reference; *tactical*, any unusual syntactical usage employed by the poet and *ontological*, poetry that does not conform to standard poetic concepts of the Western poetic tradition.

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