

# Purpose, Strategies and Technique of Teaching English Novel

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide instructional material on purpose, approaches, and strategies and some essential techniques of utilizing English Novels in a language classroom. As far as the rationale for focusing on novels for teaching purposes is concerned, Chen (2006) has explained that regardless of culture or background, while communicating, be it explaining a thought or making an argument, and the narrative is one of the two modes of thinking. Also, because of the engaging and true to life nature of characters/relationships/events, long fiction is emotionally evocative and very effective in teaching language. A novel study allows those students to develop their reading comprehension and thinking skills through high-quality literature. It lets them practice and refine their skills related to the standards in a much more engaging format than the typical reading textbook. A novel study is an opportunity to build a love of reading.

**Keywords: English novel, language, reading, strategies, technique, purpose**

## Purpose of Teaching English Novel

Two of the primary purposes of teaching English Novels around the globe are: literary competence and language acquisition.

## Literary Competence

An English literature degree course with a focus on developing the literacy competence of students typically incorporates the teaching of English Novels with emphasis on studying canonical and classical texts to train the students to define the term 'novel', explain the characteristics of a novel as a genre and its types, summarize the evolution of the genre from a historical perspective and enumerate the various contributing factors that lead to its development, analyze passages from the text, cite textual evidence to support inferences drawn from the text about ideas, identify and explain essential elements like plot, theme, characters, setting, point of view, draw attention to a stylistic peculiarity to appreciate the ways that writers use language and devices to achieve particular literary effects and provide inspiration for creative composition in fiction by students themselves. The novel is a genre that is open-ended, socially engaged, and exploratory, one that challenges and stretches the prevailing canons of knowledge, perception, and literary representation in its bid to picture and probe an evolving contemporary reality. Through an analytical and critical engagement with novels, it is believed students not only gain knowledge of literary heritage and acquire insights about the culture, society, and world around them but also develop a tolerance for varied, new and even contradicting perspectives. It also promotes behavioral change by enabling students to imbibe moral, ethical, national and cultural values.

## Language Acquisition

English novels as teaching material are considered a rich reserve for designing tasks for listening, speaking, reading and writing practice in the domain of language teaching. In addition to exemplifying grammatical structures, pre-reading tasks, interactive work on the text and follow-up activities based on reading novels, prove useful in bolstering communicative competence in learners, enabling them to internalize the English language by reinforcement of the grammar rules and vocabulary already learnt through incidental learning. Moreover, by providing the opportunity to experience an authentic linguistic context, literary texts also

challenge students to model their speech and writing. One of the biggest benefits of literature is its ability to ignite interest and motivate students by involving them on an emotional and personal level. As a result, literary texts are representational rather than referential. Literature engages learners' emotions through representational language, as opposed to referential language, which is informational and communicates at a single level. Additionally, it enhances their creativity and imagination.

### **Strategies for Teaching English Novels in Language Classrooms**

The distinctive features of the novel as a literary genre, which consists of three interrelated components: the story, the language, and the style of presentation, should be taken into account while selecting strategies for the teaching of novels. An effective novel reading experience that is rewarding and academically enriching must include the explication of the elements of long fiction such as theme, plot, setting, characterization, point of view, style, symbolism, etc. Another consideration to be given importance is that learners are often non-native speakers of English. An integrated approach to texts as linguistic resources and cultural artefacts, through the use of motivation-building techniques that facilitate overall comprehension, interpretation, and cultural orientation, is most beneficial in such a scenario.

### **Three-phase approach, which includes pre-, while-, and post-reading stages**

Tricia Hedge advocates the three-phase approach for tackling a text. It is also reflected in most contemporary materials. It includes three consequential stages namely: pre-, while-, and post-reading stages.

**1. The Pre-reading stage** includes tasks/activities done by students that familiarize them with the text before they read the text in detail. In this stage “the teacher can prepare them in terms of both schematic and language knowledge, and ensure purposeful reading” (210). So the teacher can orient students to the context, get them acquainted with the content, enable them to identify a reason for reading, make them communicate an attitude about the topic, recall their own experiences about the topic, activate prior cultural knowledge and help them become accustomed to the language in the text. Some activities considered effective for this are: reading about the author, predicting the story based on the title, scanning some critical quotes on the back cover of the book, skimming a few paragraphs at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the text (especially for long texts) to get an initial overview of the text to be read.

**2. The while-reading stage** includes activities that a pupil engages in while reading the text to achieve the lesson's objectives by keeping them active during the reading process. The tasks comprise doing a closer analysis of the text and language features. Some activities considered effective for this purpose are asking students for a reaction to different opinions or themes expressed in the book or answering the questions, reading discussions, predicting what is next, true or false statements, sentence completion exercises, multiple-choice questions, yes/no response questions, pronominal questions (WH- questions) that begin with who, what, when, why, where, how etc.

**3. Post-Reading Stage** - According to Hedge, activities “can be as varied as the texts they follow, but ideally will tie-up with the reading purpose set, so that students check and discuss activities done while reading and make use of what they have read in a meaningful way, for example, by discussing their response to the writer's opinions or by using notes for a writing activity”. Such activities usually involve a detailed revision and consolidation of what is read employing extracting the main idea, summarizing, retelling, role play, gap-filling, debate, etc. These tasks help students integrate and relate what they have read with what they already know. They are also made to relate to it emotionally.

### **Some Effective Techniques to Make Teaching English Novel Engaging**

Despite the availability of several new techniques for teaching the English novel, the traditional lecture and discussion method are prominently used in college classrooms. Teachers resort to the same old methods year after year, leading to boredom, which not only depletes their enthusiasm but also reduces their teaching effectiveness. Adopting new and different techniques will lend vitality to the teaching-learning process and will also make it engaging for the learners. Some interesting techniques enumerated by Sister Mary Janet are discussed below:

- **Cutting-** Teaching-learning is a time-bound process. At times due to the paucity of time certain novels cannot be thoroughly read to leave enough time for those who should be, yet familiarity with them is essential to get a better understanding of the novel's development as a genre. For example, in the context of 18th-century novels, an epistolary novel like *Clarissa* might be presented to the class by students prepared to read the characters' parts after judiciously cutting *Teaching English Novel in Language Classroom*. The parts that have been cut might be assigned for out-of-class reading. This technique can prove useful for generalization on a type of novel.
- **Sampling:** This technique is useful in introducing types of novels. For instance, to acquaint students with essential features of Gothic novels, presenting a substantial assortment of representative selections can be circulated in the classroom for students to read and give reactions. If the group is large, the samples could be read aloud by prepared students.
- **Critical Opinions:** After reading the novel, presenting students with diverse and contradictory opinions by critics on the same novel can garner interest and engender effective close reading. For instance, presenting contrasts in the views of critics on *Wuthering Heights*. It can be done in various ways such as the teacher may read pertinent excerpts from the essays or summarize the critic's position, critical essays may be assigned for out-of-class reading or assigned to superior students for class reports. These devices can catapult main ideas into an expeditious discussion and help the students clarify their interpretations by defending, refuting or modifying the critic's arguments.
- **Lectern Reading:** After ensuring that the novel has been read by the students, as a preparatory activity for in-depth analysis of a key scene that stands as a microcosm of the total work, pre-rehearsed students might do a book-in-hand/lectern reading of the scene for the class. For instance, the proposal scene in *Jane Eyre* can be used for this activity to explicate the romantic world of the novel.
- **Chamber Theatre:** it is a technique for the presentation of the narrative of a short story that leaves the story material untouched. Scenes from the novel too complete with their descriptions and dialogues with students reading and walking through the actions as on stage can be taught in this manner. The key scene presented thus then can act as a springboard for a lecture, oral or written discussions, informal observations and questions and answers on the significance of what they have just seen.
- **Prepared Questions:** Unlike the traditional question-answers that lead to inconclusive vagaries, before the reading of the novel teacher poses to students (best in writing), not more than four to six specific questions that would draw the attention of students to some important ideas and concepts. Students may be allowed to respond to the answers orally. A screening of the questions by the teacher is necessary to weed out repetitious and irrelevant questions.
- **Topical Assignments:** Instead of questions the teacher can present a list of pertinent topics from the novel to the students and ask students to choose one topic to stay particularly aware of it during the reading of the book and develop it to present to the class in writing or discussion. *Great Expectations* might be explored through topics like "characterization or caricature", "Portrait of Pip as Snob", "The Two Endings" etc.
- **Pre-read Lectures-** Copies of a written lecture can be distributed to students for reading out of class, followed by a close reading of the novel. Class time can then be dedicated to questions and discussion.
- **Group Papers:** A variation on the standard seminar technique in which students prepare papers on novels and present them for class can prove useful if three or four students could be assigned to write critical papers on the same novel or contribute sections to a common paper for presentation as a group. Another variation on this can be the practice of thesis defence, which requires the students to present and defend their thesis. It proves effective in smaller groups.

- **The Hidden Panel:** An adaptation of a standard symposium or group discussion, it can be most effective in generating a general class response, when a small prepared group of students is dispersed through a larger group. These students provoke discussion of the novel under study as if done spontaneously.

### Conclusion:

It appears as it is seen on surface level that teaching of English novel is a comparatively an easy job but it is not the truth. On the contrary, it requires a lot of literary competence. The teacher needs to use all necessary strategies discussed above and should acquire fair amount of knowledge of literary history of novel and how novel got evolved as a literary form. This longest form of literature has its own beauty and it is appreciated with patience.

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