**Course Objectives**

By the end of the course students will be able to:

1. Recognize the need for using literature in the language classroom
2. Learn about the criteria for selecting and evaluating materials
3. Understand the need for reading literature cross-culturally
4. Know about four different approaches to using literature with the language learner

* A language-based approach to using literature
* A content-based approach to using literature
* Literature for personal enrichment

1. Plan lessons around four different literary genres using different approaches

* Short story
* Novel
* Poetry
* Biography

1. Assess students’ literary learning
2. **Chapter One: Using Literature in the Language Classroom**

The emphasis in this chapter is mainly on exploring some of those underlying issues and concerns relevant to using literature with the language learner. Ideas generated in this chapter will not help to pinpoint the definitive, right or correct way to teach or use literature. This is because every teaching situation is different, every literary text is different and every theory explaining literature itself or how to use it in the classroom is different. The task for teachers is thus to draw on the range of insights available, and then to develop an approach appropriate and relevant to their students.

**Examining the reasons for using literature**

**MOTIVATING MATERIAL**

In many countries around the world, literature is highly valued. For this reason, students of English may experience a real sense of achievement at tackling literary materials in the classroom. If students are familiar with literature in their own language, then studying some literature in English can provide an interesting and thought-provoking point of comparison. This may apply equally well if students come from a culture with a rich oral tradition, where the body of written literature is fairly restricted. Asking students to retell short stories from their own culture, for example, before getting them to read an authentic story in English on a similar theme, could be highly motivating.

Literature exposes students to complex themes and fresh, unexpected uses of language. A good novel or short story may be particularly gripping in that it involves students in the suspense of unravelling the plot. This involvement may be more absorbing for students than the pseudo-narratives frequently found in course books. A play may engage students in complicated adult dilemmas. A poem may elicit a powerful emotional response from students. If the materials are carefully chosen, students will feel that what they do in the classroom is relevant and meaningful to their own lives.

**ACCESS TO CULTURAL BACKGROUND**

Literature can provide students with access to the culture of the people whose language they are studying. But this is an area of some complexity. To begin with, the relationship between a culture and its literature is not at all simple, since few novels or poems could claim to be a purely factual documentation of their society. Some novels, short stories and plays may achieve the illusion of representing reality, but they are, in the end, works of fiction. It has been argued that poetry has possibly an even more indirect link with the 'real world' since it creates its meaning by an orientation towards language itself (Widdowson, 1984, p. 149).

Secondly, if we do assume that a literary text in some way 'reflects' its culture, then exactly what aspect of that culture is being mirrored and how reliably? There is a danger that students will fall into the fallacy of assuming that a novel, for example, represents the totality of a society, when in fact it is a highly atypical account of one particular milieu during a specific historical period. And if we are considering the issue of how far a literary work genuinely represents its culture, then we are inevitably drawn into the question of how culture is defined. Is our definition to be an anthropological one in which culture is defined loosely as the values, traditions and social practices of a particular group - which are then revealed in the literary text? Or do we define culture as the discernment and knowledge traditionally possessed by the well-educated, enlightened and cultivated native speaker which is passed on in 'good literature'? What then is the place of 'popular culture' which may in fact be of greater interest to many of our learners?

A further issue to consider is that English is now used globally as a first, second and foreign language.6 How far the language can be separated from culture is a difficult and intriguing question. Literary texts in English reflect the rich and fascinating diversities of our world. They are written by authors living in many different countries and widely divergent cultures. By exposing our students to literature in English, it seems that we should be asking them to think about the range of cultures from which literature in English is produced. But frequently, the teaching of literature is identified with the imposition of particular imperialistic values. Chris Searle has described how in the Caribbean, students of British literature had the feeling that 'they had to pit the world and the people they knew around them against a barrage of hostile, alienated knowledge which bore no relation to the reality they saw around them' (Searle, 1984, p. 17). And writing of literature teaching in Kenyan schools, Ngugi wa Thiong'o describes how Kenyan school children are confronted 'with a distorted image of themselves and of their history as reflected in European imperialist literature' (Brumfit and Carter, 1986, p. 225).

It can be argued that reading literature in English does encourage students to become broadly aware of the social, political and historical events which form the background to a particular play or novel. At the same time, literature does seem to provide a way of contextualising how a member of a particular society might behave or react in a specific situation. A description of a farm in the outback, for example, in a short story by an Australian author, might familiarise students with the typical scenery and social structures to be expected in such a setting. More interestingly, it could provide them with insights into the possible relationships, emotions and attitudes of the inhabitants of the farm. In other words, using literature with our students may enable them to gain useful and often surprising perceptions about how the members of a society might describe or evaluate their experiences. But as this description is very likely to be only a partial one, we should encourage students to treat it critically. In fact, our response to the cultural aspect of literature should always be a critical one, so that the underlying cultural and ideological assumptions in the texts are not merely accepted and reinforced, but are questioned, evaluated and, if necessary, subverted.7

**ENCOURAGING LANGUAGE ACQUISITION**

In many countries around the world students have fairly limited access to spoken English, and written English often takes on primary importance for stimulating language acquisition. Literature may provide a particularly appropriate way of stimulating this acquisition, as it provides meaningful and memorable contexts for processing and interpreting new language. Obviously, at lower levels, students may be unable to cope on their own with an authentic novel or short story in English. Any extensive reading we encourage them to do outside the classroom would probably need to be of graded material, such as graded readers. But at higher levels, students may be so absorbed in the plot and characters of an authentic novel or short story, that they acquire a great deal of new language almost in passing. The reading of literature then becomes an important way of supplementing the inevitably restricted input of the classroom. And if recorded literary material is available, then students can acquire a great deal of new language by listening to it.

Within the classroom itself, the use of literary texts is often a particularly successful way of promoting activities where students need to share their feelings and opinions, such as discussions and group-work. This is because literature is very rich in multiple levels of meaning. Focussing on a task which demands that students express their own personal responses to these multiple levels of meaning can only serve to accelerate the students' acquisition of language. Acquisition may also be accelerated because the overall context for processing the new language is so striking. Take, for example, a dramatised play reading with a group of intermediate learners. While reading an extract from the play on their own, they may find themselves unfamiliar with some of the vocabulary in the extract. But by listening to the extract read aloud by the teacher, or better still acted out on cassette, they may be able to hazard a useful guess as to the meaning of a new word; a guess facilitated by their understanding of the relationship between the speakers and the intonation they use to express this. Or, take a group of children who have only an elementary grasp of English. Asking them to read a simple poem aloud, possibly accompanied by gestures or mime, may be an effective way of helping them to internalise vocabulary, grammar patterns or even intonation.

1. **Chapter Two: Selecting and Evaluating Materials**

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| In Chapter 1, we considered the different reasons to using literature with the language learner. In this chapter we focus more specifically on how to select texts and materials which are suitable for use with your students. Of course, you may not have a choice of either texts or materials since you are bound by a syllabus. If you do have some choice in the selection of texts and materials, then the first section of this chapter will help to pinpoint some criteria for selecting literary texts to use with your learners, while section two suggests ways of evaluating published materials. |

* 1. **Selecting Texts**

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| In choosing a literary text for use with your students, you should think about three main areas. These are: the type of course you are teaching, the type of students who are doing the course and certain factors connected with the text itself. We begin by thinking about the first of these - the type of course you are teaching. |

**Chapter Three: Reading Literature Cross-Culturally**

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| In Chapter 1 we touched very briefly on the problems of teaching literature across cultures. It was pointed out that readers invariably interpret texts in the light of their own world-view and cultural experience. It was also mentioned that the relationship between a literary text and the culture in which it is produced is highly complex, since few texts are mere factual representations of their culture. |

**Chapter Four: Approaches to Using literature with the Language Learner**

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| The aim of this chapter is to examine the possible approaches which you could draw on when using literature with your students. Pinpointing possible approaches can help us to select and design materials for classroom use, as well as to assess the suitability of published materials. We begin by considering these approaches in very general terms; later sections will examine some of the issues and problems they raise in more specific detail. |

**Chapter Five: Material Design and Lesson Planning**

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| In this chapter we explore some of the distinctive features of the short story and novel. Examining these features will enable us to develop ways of using short stories and novels with our students. |

**Chapter Six: Assessment of Literary Learning**