



TEACHING POETRY AT THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN GHANA

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Abstract:

The importance of poetry in the life of the child cannot be over-emphasized. This has to the necessity of incorporating the teaching of this aspect of literature in the curriculum at the Junior High School level in Ghana. This works looks at the importance of poetry and what it seeks to achieve in the life of the child and then, delves into the pedagogies involved in treating the subject at this level of study. It provides the necessary steps that can guide teachers to do the teaching of poetry with ease and also to stimulate the interest of the pupils at this level of education.

Keywords: poetry, junior high school, teaching, Ghana

1. Introduction

Literature can be expressed as anything written to disseminate or pass on concepts, ideas or an opinion. This conforms that; we may have scientific literature to entail theory, pertaining to scientific experiment.

In other sense, literature can also be seen as the artistic use of language to convey ideas. This difference between literature and religion or history (as they both convey ideas) is that literature place a premium on the way in which the ideas are present that is, the use of the language and its arrangement.

Furthermore, literature does not necessarily have to present the barest truth. More often than not, the feelings and idiosyncrasies of the writers or oral performers have been brought to bear on material present. Also, the subject matter could be fictive. Literature can be said to easiest in two systematic forms namely, written literature and

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oral literature. Written literature deals with written works of artistic vitality or importance.

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines Literature differently as: *"Writings that is valued as works of art, especially fiction, drama and poetry: writings on a particular subject; printed material used eg. to advertise or promote a product."*

The Chamber 20th Century Dictionary has also defined literature as: *"The art of composition in prose and verse: the whole body literacy composition usually, or in any language, or any subject etc. literacy matter printed matter, human learning: literacy culture or knowledge."* The afore-stated definition, illustrates a clear picture of literature in English as a subject taught in the classroom.

The writing that are valued as works of art come to its form varied origins and countries for different purposes and at a subject talked of or written about through somebody's eye or the opposite. These works of arts which are solely ideas or facts translated to readers in three different forms namely: poetry (verse), prose (novel) and drama (which is, performed as a play) all of which literature is the genetic time.

Poetry which is an aspect of literature deals with the collection of poems or poems in general. Some of the examples of poetry are 'the Mesh' the Keasi Brew, 'building the nation' by Henry Barlow and the 'vulture', by David Diop.

Prose is explained the New Oxford Learners dictionary as written or spoken language that is not in verse. In prose or novel expression is much more differed that it is in poetry. This means that more works are employed in prose than in poetry. Prose could be classified in two: fiction and non-fiction. Fiction is stories or writings about imaginary people and events where as non-imaginative stories are non-fiction. The following are some of the examples on prose: 'Things Fall Apart' by Chinua Achebe; "Animal Farm" by George Orwell and Silas Marner' by George Elliot.

Oral literature on the other hand is the land that come into being with the beginning of social organization that is, when man began to live in communities. Oral literature includes the following: folktales, stories, proverbs, usages, folk-wisdom, folk-beliefs. These might differ from place to place but their application is almost universal. They are called oral literature and oral literature is consciously created by individual to follow certain modes or styles. On the other hand, the components have no individual creation; they have collective authorship; they are spontaneous and their forms are not consciously decided by anybody but they are nonetheless identifiable; they are popular are intimately bond up with the cultures of the people.

Examples of drama are, The Marriage of Anansewa by Efua T. Sutherland, The Lion and the Jewel by Wole Soyinka and Macbeth by William Shakespeare. With the explanation and components of literature, in mind, it is obvious that literature helps in transmitting culture. The moral in literary genre portrays the values and beliefs of a people. When one gets into contact with literature when it is being performed orally or when one reads it from a book, one gets to know that literature entails: the cultural

practices of the people. Such a person becomes well and versed in the cultured and also imparts it to the future generations. Closely associated with the above is that, literature helps in purging the society of unwanted practices and behavior. Certain behavior and practices which are unwanted in a particular society are discarded through literature. One reads to know so many things and through that certain change occur in one's life. Certain behaviors which society frown on and other values which society cherishes most are also paid picked to make life suitable for the society.

Literature in the form of oral history helps in to reconstruct the history of a people. Literature could therefore be seen as a historical document. When one reads, one gets to know the history of one's ancestors and how they came to settle where they are. Such information could be drama from an elderly person in his or her society family or could be read from books that have been kept in such a way that they are refined to be useful to the pupil.

Also, literature creates social cohesion. Myths, legends, and historical narratives which border on people's origin or important past to help to correct social cohesion among the people, that is, as people with a common history and destiny. This makes them history to a particular person and brings "we-feeling" among them through literature.

Literature helps in teaching the developing language. In the course of teaching, literature, proverbs and encapsulated thought, creation of new words comes in. Proverbs and new words feature prominently in literature, so while teaching these things come out and explanations are given and also we learn how to construct them in our daily lives.

Again, literature is a source of entertainment. As a source of entertainment, literature relieves man of his boredom. The humorous actions and mines that are found in literature make them laugh and also release boredom from him.

It is also a source of refreshing ideas in all sorts of subjects. For example, one reflects on economic, social and political life after reading literature or coming into contact with a literacy piece. On the political scene for example, one is able to take a firm stand without being manipulated by politicians after going through the biographies and political experiences of such politicians

In addition to this, literature is a source of recreation or relaxation to many people. One may sit down many hours reading books, listening to stories, folktales and watching activities or performances that are associated with literature. When one reads book one becomes conscious of life is in one's surrounding and is able to adjust oneself to the society.

Furthermore, literature brings about socialization book reading and play acting erase shyness hence literature students become sociable and are able to deliver a speech in the presence of so many people.

This is not all, literature is an employment. Actors employed in various theaters earn their living through that state. Examples of such groups are: Kyeremanteng plays at the centre for national culture, Abibigoma of Legon, Kingdom Players of Tema, Daakye, Obra and many more which feature on television, radio and in theaters.

Finally, when one studies literature, one becomes emotionally, imaginatively, creatively and aesthetically developed. One has imaginative powers to imagine situations and can also use his creativity to create certain things needed in the society. From the discussions, it has been seen that literature is a very important subject which must be studied by every student for a better life.

2. Definition and Importance of Poetry

Poetry is a form of compression of ideas and feelings associated with poetry. What might be expressed in a whole page of open prose would be written in only a few short lines of poetry. Once the skill has been acquired for understanding and dissecting a poem, the student can face every other written form with confidence and ease.

Some of the most common types of poetry are:-

1. Descriptive: poems which describe people or experiences, scenes or objects;
2. Reflective: thoughtful poem often containing a great deal of description which the poet comments on or from which he draws conclusions are directly stated at other times they are implied;
3. Narrative: poem which tell a story. They tend to be longer than other types but it is comparatively easy to recognize the poet's intentions;
4. The lyric: usually a short poem like a song which is usually the expression of a feeling;
5. The sonnet: a poem of fourteen lines which follow a very strict rhyme pattern. It is usually divided into two parties: the 'octave' (the first eight lines) and the 'sextet' (the last six lines). The octave and the sextet are separated by a break in thought: a general statement made in the octave is illustrated or amplified in the sextet. Sonnets tend to be difficult because a great deal of meaning is often conveyed in a few lines.

To begin with, the importance of poetry cannot be over emphasized.

First of all, it reveals our everyday experiences and activities. For example the way we dress, and our libation to the gods, our traditional music and dances a chief's genuflectures from the palanquin and that stones of war, courtship, death etc

Secondly, it also helps in language development that is vocabulary acquisition by going through the unfamiliar words fluently by reading commuting lines into memory. For example from one line and lines that have punctuation at the end.

Thirdly, poetry develops the four communicative skills. Pupils lesson to teachers reading or teachers telling the general meaning of the poem. Pupils also read at least the important parts of the poem and write about their feelings.

Fourthly, poetry helps pupils to draw moral lesson from poems. For example, choices between right and wrong and good and evil. For example, when one reads Psalm 23 II by Timothy Wanga, one is exposed to the evils going on in the country, as such, the person will be able to make his/her choice at the end of the day. What is more, poetry, encourages, class participation and increases pupils' confidence. That is to say, pupils' contribution to the poem makes them self-confident.

Poetry is an art which more or less prepare individuals to speak in public. So with the study of poetry, children are able to speak in public without fear. Poetry aims at developing in children the use of mining. This goes a long way to induce children to act without talking or by use of sign and gestures and be able to convey meaning.

It is a means of revealing certain taboos and penalties which nature inflicts on those who break the societal norms.

It also reveals society's or country's history eg. Poems, colonization. For example, 'the vultures' by David Diop.-----0 the bitter memories of extorted kisses.

*"Of promises broken at the point of a gun.
Of foreigners who did not seem human-----"*

Poetry also fosters entertainment and relaxation. That is, it relieves boredom and tension and answers some of the children's hidden questions or problems. Also, a short poem could be used to arouse pupils interest in class when they are dozing.

Last but not the least, poetry is to tell stories. For example, in the poem 'Our History' by Mbella Sonne Dipoko, we are told the story of how to Whiteman came and deceived our people and later took over their land. Although we were not yet born, through the story of the poem, we are informed about it.

Nonetheless, poetry is used to convey moral lessons, which has the theme of a lienature, we see that two people were on the verge of separation. The other seems not consent to it. Here we learn although we may be at fault with others, we must learn to seek reconciliation and not separation. And this is conveyed through poetry.

Poetry is also used to teach scientific ideas and practical knowledge. For example, poetry helps to acquire knowledge in terms of practically and helps convey ideas to us.

Other poems are also used to praise God. Some of these are used to reflect on the creation of God and nature as a whole and through this, praises are showered on God. At times through poetry, we express our thanks to God for what He has done for mankind and examples are provision of air, food, water, rains and so on.

3. Presentation of Poems

A. Writer's Own Composition

Nature

*"Nature, you cannot be thrown away
Nature, you are the strength of humanity
The peaceful, blissful, blossoming flower:
Are part of you.
When I think of nature
Nothing, can replace it
Ao, nature is beautiful
The birds that fly by day
And the insects that produce pleasant sounds
Help to make 'nature' place to be
The eclipse of the moon and sun
Which have not been experienced by
The present generation a nature's wonder work
The differences in animals and their colours
Contribute to the beautification of nature
Nature is beautiful
All these things show the mighty work of God."*

Love

*"Let there be love shared
Among us
Let there be love
In our eyes
May our love sweep this country
Love passes all understanding
Love is kind not wicked
Love is patient not hasty
Love gives a fresh understanding of humanity
Love teaches long-suffering
Love breaks one language
That is love one another as yourself
Love does not kill but protects
Love is the gift of God
Let there be love"*

Note: This poem brings to light the record of love and what is required of man to do, to show love.

Peace

*“Peace! Peace! Oh Peace
Let there be peace and no War
Tears have no mouth to speak
Tears tell no stones
Tears can solve no problem
Neither can they defend
Tear is a disease causing organism
Which heals no wounds
Nor stops any pain
Tear Oh tears
Tears cannot save
Let there be peace
And solutions could follow.”*

Note: ‘Peace’ is the message this poem is carrying to its readers, the goodwill it brings to mankind.

Africa Today

*“Coups here, coups there, coups everywhere
On the present political scene of Africa
Why, African politicians, coup, coup, coup, everyday?
It is a case of immaturity in the present African politics?
Is it a case of tyranny and power monopoly?
Is it a case of nepotism and malpractices for selfish ends?
Is a case of over-anxiety and lack of patience?
Can you search your hearts for the causes
And find remedial measures to prevent
Coup here there, coups everywhere
On the present political scene of Africa?”*

A Farmer’s Lamentation

*Will I never succeed in life?
Should I always toil in vain?
What have I done to nature?
That she should treat me so?*

*I plant the seeds and they blown
But before the harvest comes,
They are always destroyed by pest.
Nature, what have I done to you
That I do not desire your favor?*

*I sow the seed in tears
Hoping to reap in joy
But my dreams never come true*

*Perhaps there will be time
At time to bring me success
A season to bring me happiness
Nature, be kind to me*

4. Suitability of the Poems

The Oxford Students' Dictionary of Current English defines a 'poem' as a piece of creative writing expressing deep feeling in beautiful language: one written to describe an experience.

The chambers 20th century dictionary also has it that, 'poem' is a composition of high beauty of thought or language and artistic form, typically, but not necessarily in verse.

Poems are collectively known as poetry which in Hutchman's new 20th century Encyclopedia is defined as 'the imaginative expression of emotion or thought, usually in material form'. In all literatures, poetry develops to perfection much earlier than prose, largely because it offers greater aids to accelerate memorizing before appearance of writing materials.

The writer chose this aspect of literature due to its contribution to the development of the language skills and imaginative skills of the pupil. This also contributes massively to the vital skills a student must pass in learning English language, that is the effort to read and understand fully, any printed word in English language.

The appropriateness of poetry to the S.S.S child cannot be underestimated. In other words, the J.S.S child should never be denied the chance of learning poetry. To make everything obvious, we need to look at the interest of the pupil: their language developments their age level, the cultural background and their emotional and moral development. The interest of the pupils must be provided for, during any lesson in class. For what matter, poetry aims at sustaining this interest of the pupils and helping them to attain academic progress.

This is the main reason why poems at this level are made short and interesting with simple language. The messages are usually of common place. For example, the poems about love and nature which have included in my sample poems in this essay.

Nowadays, children are growing at a very fast rate hence whatever is learnt must provide room for this growth. Poems are created to suit both the chronological age and mental age of children. This makes it easy for all the pupils on a class to enjoy the poem.

At the J.S.S level, the children are very young and therefore need short and concise poems. Poems with simple language which will help the pupils to develop greatest interest in poetry and develop love for literature. For example, "Love" and "a farmer's" lamentation" in the sample poems",

Another sector where poetry becomes appropriate to the consideration of the level of language is the development of pupils. In view of this, the language of the poems like "Africa Today" will move the pupils in and readers in the future. That is to say it helps the pupils to develop reading skills to such an extent that their language background will be strong.

In saving his time and the children's time, the teacher must select short poems with simple language and when teaching the poems, his language must also be very simple for all the pupils to grasp what the lesson intends to achieve. This can be easily seen in 'love'-let there be love shared us or let there be love in our eyes.....

In order to make a poetry lesson enjoyable and appropriate, the teacher needs to think a little about the cultural back of his readers. This will help him in selecting the correct type of poems suitable for the pupils. It will at the same time aid him, prepare appropriate teaching materials for the lesson. For example, in the rural setting, a poem about "nature" will be enjoyable to the children.

Poems are factually, created or written to carry the experienced of the poet to his readers. Most of the time, poems aim at teaching good morals. Since at the J.S.S level the pupils are noted to be in their transitional period. In their educational, they need moral lessons provided by the poem to mold their character. They are at great advantage when poems are treated under themes like, kindness, heroism and sense. The poem 'peace' endeavors to teach the pupils good morals for good social co-existence. This may usher them into peace-loving citizens of Ghana in the near future.

All said and done, one sees that poetry is very appropriate to the J.S.S child the language is simple and easy to be understood by the child. The message of the poem must have something to do not their moral and emotional growth. The afore-stated facts are no doubt provided by the poetry in his essay to satisfy the needs of the J.S.S student.

School: O.T.C Demonstration
Class: J.S.S.
Subject: Literature in English
Date: 31/3/2015

J.S.S On. On. Rolls: 34
Average: 134
Time: 10.30-10.40AM

Duration	Aspect/ Reference Topic/ Sub Topic	Objective (s) R.P.K	Teaching / Learning Materials Teachers/ Learner Activities	Core Points	Evaluation
70 Mins	Aspect Poetry	Objective(s): By the end of the lesson, one should be able to identify effect of peace on mankind. (ii) Must be able to read the poem for meaning.	T/L Materials Illustration on the chalkboard. Picture of a peaceful environment Introduction. T/L Activities (1) Tr. Writes the poems on the board (2) Tr. Asks the one to mention the effects of peace on man (3) Mention some of the benefits of peace (4) Pre-Reading State (1) Tr. Introduces lesson by asking them how they live within their peaceful environment (2) Reading State Tr. Reads the poem a loud with gestures after which the teacher gives out copies of the poems to pupils to read silently asks them of tell the surface hearing of the poem	The poem is sending the message of the goodwill that peace brings to mankind (3) Meaning of keywords in the poem. Eg. Tears, organism, defend, solutions, wounds etc Advanced Learner Dictionary Meanings Organism: a living being esp a very small one Wounds: an injury to part of the body	(1) When peace is there people live comfortably True/ False (2) Do you like the poem? (3) What is the effect of peace on mankind? (4) Tears cannot save True/ False (5) What causes peace in a country to be broken

Remarks: Lesson was successful because pupils enjoyed it and contributed much to it.

Duration	Aspect/ Reference Topic/ Sub Topic	Objective(s) R.P.K	Teaching/ Learning Materials Teachers/ Learner Activities	Core Points	Evaluation
			<p>Post Reading Stage Teacher asks pupils to form groups of four members to discuss the notes on the poem and later provides answers to the following questions. (1) What is the poem about? (2) How do we embrace peace? (3) How do you feel about the poem? (4) Teacher discusses the points with the children Teacher again asks one to read the poem more closely and use the poem to act drama</p>		

School: O.T.C Demonstration
Class: J.S.S 1
Subject: Literature in English
Date: 31-3-2015

J.S.S On. On. Rolls: 34
Average: 134
Time: 10.30-10.40AM

Duration	Aspect/ Reference Topic/ Sub Topic	Objective (s) R.P.K	Teaching/ Learning Materials Teachers/ Learner Activities	Core Points	Evaluation
70 Mins	Aspect Poetry Topic Love Reference Trs. verse BK 1 Page 36	Objective(s): 2:3:2 By the end of the lesson, pupils should be able to read the poem meaningfully and be able to relate what they learnt to their lifestyle 2:4:2: Recount the lesson they have learnt from the poem R.P.K. Pupils feel the essence of love to one another	T/L Materials The use of pictures on a cardboard T/L Act Introduction. Let pupils recite any familiar poem they know Act I- Put the chart on one side of the blackboard and ask questions about it. Pre-Reading State Act I- Introduce the title of the poem 'Love' by writing it in the BB. ACTII: Helps pupils to deduce the meaning of difficult words from the context. Reading Stage ACT III- Tr gives a model reading of the poem to the children	General meaning of the poem (1) This poem bring to light the rewards of love and what is required of man to do, to show love (2) Meaning of keywords in the poem of shared, hasty, humanity, pretest, suffering Advanced Learner Dictionary Meanings (3) Long suffering bearing problems hasty, said, made or dome quickly or too quickly (4) Focus on sounds let there love shared among us. Let there be love in our eye etc.	(1) Love passes all understanding, why? (2) What does love give to humanity? (3) What does the love teachers (4) Love breaks what?

Remarks: Lesson was not successful because of the length of the poem. Made another time with children.

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Duration	Aspect/ Reference Topic/ Sub Topic	Objective(s) R.P.K	Teaching/ Learning Materials Teachers/ Learner Activities	Core Points	Evaluation
70 Mins	Aspect Poetry Reference Trs. verse BK 1 Page 81	Objective(s): the end of the lesson, pupils should be able to know interpretation and give their reaction to the effect of destroying nature. R.P.K. Pupils have been seeing animal and trees in their environment	T/L Materials Pictures of trees, animals and flowers on the school compound. Recorded cassette of the poem T/L Activities Introduction Pastes pictures on one side of the blackboard and ask questions about them (b) Mention some animals and trees that can be found in their houses (c) state some of their benefits to human-beings Pre-Reading State Introduces lesson to pupils by asking them how they fall about the things God created Reading Stage Teacher now plays the recorded poem on the cassette Teacher reads the poem aloud with gestures after which the teacher gives out the copies of the poems to the pupils to read silently and asks them to put the surface meaning of poem down Post Reading (1) Teacher asks pupils to form a group of four members to discuss the notes on the poem and later provide the answer to the following questions (i) What is the poem about?	The poem draws our focus to nature as something beautiful and wonderful and shows the potency of God in creation (2) the meaning of the keywords: (3) Blissful: extremely happy, great joy (b) blossoming of flowers esp of a fruit, trees, or bush (c) Beautification to make something beautiful.	(1) Nature shows the mighty owners of who? (2) How do you fell about the poem? (3) Nothing can replace nature True/ False (4) Nature is the strength of humanity, True/ False (5)

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			(ii) What do you feel about the poem? (iii) Teacher again asks pupils to read the poem more closely and divides the class into two groups to debate in the topic. "Nature is the work of God"		
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Remark: The lesson was very much successful. Children contributed a lot to the success of the lesson

6. Teaching / Learning Materials

Poem I: Peace

*“Peace! Peace! Oh Peace
Let there be peace and no War
Tears have no mouth to speak
Tears tell no stones
Tears can solve no problem
Neither can they defend
Tear is a disease causing organism
Which heals no wounds
Nor stops any pain
Tear Oh tears
Tears cannot save
Let there be peace
And solutions could follow.”*

Teaching Materials

- **Chalk board**, for writing the poem on it;
- **Flash cards**, for teaching the key words;
Humanity Long-Suffering
Shared Projects
Hasty
- **Flash cards**, to Treat the Key Words;
Solution Tears
Defend Wounds
Organism
- **Picture of Peaceful Environment**, to explain the theme ‘Peace’

Poem II: Nature

*“Nature, you cannot be thrown away
Nature, you are the strength of humanity
The peaceful, blissful, blossoming flower:
Are part of you.
When I think of nature
Nothing, can replace it
Ao, nature is beautiful
The birds that fly by day
And the insects that produce pleasant sounds*

*Help to make 'nature' place to be
The eclipse of the moon and sun
Which have not been experienced by
The present generation a nature's wonder work
The differences in animals and their colours
Contribute to the beautification of nature
Nature is beautiful
All these things show the mighty work of God."*

Teaching Materials

- **Flash cards**, to treat keywords
Nature Blossoming
Beautification Blissful
- **Radio Cassette**, to play the recorded poem to the children;
- **Tape recorder**;
- **Cassette (tape)**;
- **A picture of Animals**, to explain the theme.

Poem III: Love

*"Let there be love shared
Among us
Let there be love
In our eyes
May our sweep this country
Love passes all understanding
Love is patience and not wicked
Love is patience not hasty
Love gives a fresh understanding of humanity
Love breaks the language
That is love one another as yourself
Love does not kill but protect
Love is the gift of God
Let there be love"*

Teaching Materials

- **Chalk board**, to illustrate the poem on it;
- **Flash Cards**, to treat the keywords;
Humanity Long-Suffering
Shared Hasty
- **Picture of lovers**, to explain the theme.

References

1. Hutchman's New 20th Century Encyclopaedia.
2. Oxford Students' Dictionary of Current English.
3. The Chamber 20th Century Dictionary.

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