

- (vii) To answer questions on the passage.
- (viii) To give the synonyms and antonyms of the new words.
- (ix) To write in few lines about what you have understood from the passage.¹

TEACHING OF POETRY

Coleridge defines poetry as, "The best words in their best order." *Prof. Hudson* says, "Poetry is made out of life, belongs to life and exists for life only." According to *S. Subrahmanyam*², "Poetry is a thing of beauty : beauty of form, beauty of thought, mood, and feelings." Poetry has three aspects : emotional, imaginative and rhythmic. Teaching of poetry to students has following advantages :

(i) It helps in the all-round development of pupils, as pointed out by *S. Subrahmanyam*³, "The value of teaching poetry in English language course at the secondary school level is immense. It leads to an all-round development of the whole personality of pupils, particularly the emotional, imaginative, intellectual, aesthetic and intuitive sides.

(ii) It enriches the experiences of the pupils.

(iii) It facilitates the natural aptitude for poetry in pupils.

(iv) It enables students to learn speech rhythm through the rhythm of the poetry.

(v) It has cathartic value because it helps in expression and training of emotions. According to *Billows*⁴, "There seems to be a special value of poetry in a foreign language in opening up the fantasy and releasing the inhibited and excessively introverted types."

(vi) Poetry always imparts enjoyment and pleasure to students.

(vii) It introduces variety.

(viii) It teaches pattern sentences because of repetition of certain patterns in a poem, as is obvious in the following poem :

Twinkle twinkle little star,
How I wonder what you are,
Up above the world so high,
Like a diamond in the sky.

1 A lesson plan for teaching prose is given in Appendix A.

2 *S. Subrahmanyam : The Teacher Speaks, Vol. II.*

3 *Ibid.*

4 *F. L. Billows : The Techniques of Teaching Language, p. 233.*

But there are some educationists who think teaching of poetry is redundant and unnecessary. The arguments against poetry teaching are :

(i) English is a foreign language for Indian pupils. So, they may not understand and appreciate the beauty of poetry.

(ii) Poetry does not facilitate the linguistic aim of teaching English.

(iii) In poetry, pupils have to face vague ideas, unusual words and different word order.

(iv) It does not help in increasing vocabulary, because the words used in poetry are generally not used in day to day life.

(v) The similes and metaphors used in a poetry may be beyond pupils' understanding.

(vi) The foreign background described in poems is unfamiliar to Indian students.

In spite of all these arguments against poetry teaching, many scholars think that it is essential, keeping in view the various advantages of it. So, we can summarize in the words of *Billows*¹, "To leave poetry out of a language course is to renounce an extremely effective and labour saving method of absorbing useful language." *Menon and Patel* have said, "The aim of teaching poetry is not to improve the child's knowledge of English but to add to his joy and increase his power of appreciation of beauty."

Methods of Teaching English Poetry

There is no particular method of teaching poetry. Each poetry needs an exclusive method and treatment. For teaching poetry, teachers should plan beforehand. First of all, they should write the marginal entries, as in the lesson of prose. After this the following steps may be followed :

(1) Aims

The main aim to teaching poetry is to develop the power of appreciation of beauty. The general and specific aims are as follows :

General Aims

The following are the general aims of teaching poetry :

(i) To enable students to appreciate the beauty, rhyme and style of the poem.

(ii) To enable pupils to read aloud the poem with proper rhythm and intonation.

¹ *Ibid.*

- (iii) To enable students to enjoy the recitation of poem, whether individual or chorus.
- (iv) To make students understand the thought and imagination contained in the poem.
- (v) To train the emotions of students.
- (vi) To create a love for English literature in them.
- (vii) To develop their aesthetic sense.
- (viii) According to Ryburn, "To give pleasure and thus to lay the foundation for an adequate appreciation of English poetry which may come later."
- (ix) According to Eastman, "To leave the child with a sense of satisfaction that comes from play, from absorption or from any spontaneous activity."

Specific Aims

The specific aims of teaching poetry differ from poem to poem. They depend largely on situation, scene, feeling and thought depicted in the poem. Each poem brings a special and exclusive message from the poet. Nevertheless, the following are the specific aims of teaching any poem :

- (i) To enable students to appreciate the poem namely '.....'.
- (ii) To enable students to read the poem with correct rhyme and rhythm.
- (iii) To enable them to understand the idea of the poem.
- (iv) To communicate the pupils the exclusive message of the poem.

(2) Preparation

I. Material Aids. There is no need of material aid for poetry teaching. If the poetry is not making the scene clear then, simply a picture depicting the scene is enough.

II. Previous Knowledge. The teacher should know about the age, previous experiences and mental development of students. These help him in teaching the poetry and linking the new knowledge to the previous one.

III. Introduction. To make students ready to read the poetry, is called introduction. It differs according to the subject-matter of the poetry. Thompson and Wyatt have suggested three ways of introduction :

- (i) The best method is to read a parallel poem, i.e., a poem similar in subject-matter to the poem to be taught. If possible, the parallel poem should be of the same poet.

(ii) One method is to give the gist of the poetry and then ask two or three questions on that.

(iii) The third method is to give the life-sketch, style and characteristics of the poet.

Some more ways of introduction are :

(i) The introduction can be done by playing some music.

(ii) The teacher can ask some questions on the previous knowledge of students.

(iii) If the poem to be learnt its descriptive, a picture can be shown. Two or three questions on the picture should be asked.

Menon and Patel are of the view that introduction may be given in mother-tongue. Poem (parallel) too, can be in the mother-tongue. Whatever method the teacher employs for introduction, he should be particular about not to spoil the environment necessary for the poem.

IV. Statement of Aim. After making students curious to know about the poem (by introduction), the teacher should state the aim briefly in clear words.

(3) Presentation

Ryburn says, "A good poem is a complete whole." So, the poetry should be taught in only one unit with the following steps :

I. Meaning of Difficult Words. Exposition and explanation are not done in teaching a poem. If there are some difficult words in the poem, the teacher should tell their meaning one by one orally. He should not give much time to it.

II. Model Reading. A poem only exists for pupils if they hear and read it and thus feel the music and beauty of its language. The teacher should always remember that the medium of poetry is music and its subject-matter is emotion. Therefore, in poetry teaching what matters more is how it is read. Hence, he should give a model reading with best pronunciation, intonation, stress and rhythm. This model reading should be done twice or thrice, as wisely pointed out by *Ryburn*, "One reading, of course, is not enough. It must be read two or three times." First time, when the teacher reads the poem, the books of students should be closed and they should be asked to listen to the teacher attentively. After the first reading, students should be asked to open their books.

III. Loud Reading. The teacher should ask two or three students to read the poem just as the teacher has read. The teacher

should help them in reciting it with effect but not check them while reading, because it stops the flow.

IV. Comprehension Questions. The purpose of comprehension questions is to know if the meaning of the poem is clear to students and to make certain ideas more clear. These questions should be simple and should not break the continuity of the poem. Their number depends upon the length and ideas of the poem.

V. Appreciation Questions. Appreciation questions are to make clear the : (i) beauty, (ii) feelings and (iii) main idea of the poem. These questions test :

- (a) Appreciation of the beauty of thoughts.
- (b) Appreciation of the beauty of images.
- (c) Appreciation of the beauty of emotions.
- (d) Appreciation of the beauty of style and language.

VI. Final Model Reading. The final model reading by the teacher is done when the appreciation of the poem by the students has heightened. Its effect is much, because students feel more interest and enjoyment now.

VII. Choral Recitation. The pupils will recite the poem in chorus. It may be that the teacher recites one line, then the students follow in chorus. It helps them in overcoming shyness. Later on, they can recite it independently. It also heightens aural effect which is necessary for appreciation. Besides, it helps in emotional release, development of eloquence and fluency. Moreover, children find it as a source of enjoyment.

(4) Assignment

There is not much importance of assignment in poetry teaching. The teacher may ask to memorize the lines of the poem or to write the gist to the poem. The assignment can be related to some creative work also. The students can be asked to draw a picture depicting the scenes described in the poem.

Teaching of poetry has been nicely described by Haddow¹ in these words, "Read each poem twice, give the children time to form their own impressions, invite them to criticize the poem and help them in doing so. Let the poetry period be, as far as possible a period of joy, a period of pondering over things they love already. Let them choose for themselves the poems they are to learn by heart, each choosing his own favourites. Thus, developing a taste for poetry and training their ear to the variety of beautiful sounds.

¹ Haddow, G. L. *Teaching English*

By this, we can rouse some idea of the wealth of poetry that lies before them. Remember that we must aim at making the pupils readers of poetry, not students of poetry."

Difference in Prose and Poetry Teaching

The major difference in teaching prose and poetry are :

- (i) Prose is taught for language training and poetry teaching of poetry aims at appreciation of beauty.
- (ii) In prose teaching, exposition and explanation are main, whereas in poetry teaching it is not desirable, because it kills the aesthetic sense of the poem.
- (iii) Poetry lesson is not taught in parts like a prose lesson.
- (iv) In poetry teaching, more emphasis is put on model reading than that in prose teaching.
- (v) There is not much need of assignment in poetry teaching, as it is in prose teaching.