

**ACTIVITIES ON USING POEMS IN
TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN
LANGUAGE**

**İngilizceyi Yabancı Dil Olarak Öğretimde Şiirlerin
Kullanımı Üzerine Aktiviteler**

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Abstract

In this article the writer has presented nine authentic activities by using poems to teach English in level B1-B2. The aims of these activities are to present teachers new ideas by using poems more actively to increase the effect and motivation in English language teaching to develop vocabulary, pronunciation and create a warm atmosphere in language learning. Poetry as an art of rhythmical composition for exciting pleasure by beautiful, imaginative, or lofty thoughts can be taught at schools with the help of some relaxing activities apart from memorization so that the learners could overcome their verse phobia. Since relaxation of the mind is important the learners should be free of all psychological barriers and fears while studying the language with poems too. By this article it was aimed to bring new brainstorming solutions to teaching poetry apart from classical teaching methods at schools. With the help of these activities the learners will be able to enrich their vocabulary and support their grammar structure, form a warm atmosphere among their classmates, take poetry into brain chemistry by memorization games, have fun and learn at the same time and develop their writing skills in English learning classes. Activities such as substitution drills, group competitions, grammar translation, suggestopedia, vocabulary teaching by games and writing can be used in poems in teaching English.

Keywords: Activity, motivation, poetry.

Özet

Bu makalede yazar, B1-B2 seviye İngilizce öğretiminde şiir kullanarak dokuz aktivite sunmuştur. Bu aktivitelerin amacı öğretmenlere, İngilizce öğretiminde, şiirleri daha aktif kullanmaları için yeni fikirler sunmak, dil öğretimindeki etki ve gayreti artırmak, kelime ve telaffuz gelişiminin daha sıcak bir ortamda gerçekleşmesini sağlamaktır. Bu dinlendirici aktiviteler yardımıyla şiir, ezberden uzak, güzel, hayal edilebilir ve ulvi düşüncelerin öğretim sanatı olarak okullarda, öğrencilere şiir fobisi olmaksızın öğretilir. Zihnin dinlenmiş olması önemlidir, bu yüzden öğrenciler şiirlerle dil çalışması yaparken, bütün psikolojik engel ve korkulardan uzak kalmalıdır. Bu makalede okullarda şiir öğretimine klasik öğretim teknikleri dışında, yaratıcı tartışmaya yol açacak bazı çözümler sunulmuştur. Bu aktiviteler ile öğrenciler İngilizce derslerinde sıcak bir arkadaş ortamı içinde, dilbilgisi ve kelime hazinelerini geliştirirken, oyunlarla eğlenecek, beyinlerini harekete geçireceklerdir. Bu eğlenceli ortam aynı zamanda yazma becerilerine de katkıda bulunacaktır. Şiirlerle İngilizce öğretiminde 'yerine koyma', 'grup yarışmaları', 'dilbilgisi çevirisi', 'oyunlarla kelime öğretimi' ve 'sahne kurgulama' gibi aktiviteler kullanılabilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Etkinlik, motivasyon, şiir.

Article History:

Received

23/05/2017

Received in revised form

23/05/2017

Accepted

06/08/2017

Available online

15/08/2017

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Introduction

How many of us remember studying a poem with zest in English classes? Why do we find it hard to recite a poem by heart? May be, for us studying English as a foreign language means just focusing on text books full of grammar, whereas English classes should be ornamented with poems too. Because poetry works as a very effective means with lots of usage and benefits to enhance English. It should be used in learning English through range of activities by not only reading and writing but also speaking in B1 and B2 level. In poetry special strength is given to definition of feelings and ideas by using peculiar style and tone. It helps to develop literacy skills and shapes our way of thinking. In poetry there is emotion and it widens the learners' linguistic skills and includes feelings. Students benefit from understanding the literature and the world they live in by communicating with the help of not only sound and perception but also magical effects of the words. So when dealing with poetry in foreign language teaching a wide variety of activities or games should be used to grab the learners' attention and engage them more in the lesson to avoid monotony. In poems the learners will meet writing with graceful words and sounds specifically organized to form rhyme unlike ordinary words used in simple exercises in English books. Poetry should be a necessary item to draw the learners into poetry energetically in the activities created by teachers.

With the help of the substitution drills the learners will successfully benefit from the practice as they will connect the work on a different perspective developing their world of imagination. This will help develop their vocabulary. They can also do drills on each line to help them memorize by repeating more for improvement. With the help of the group works there will be cooperative learning which will lead to new inspiration for teachers to develop more activities in their classes. During these works the learners will discover their strengths and weaknesses so this will give the teacher a chance to evaluate the learners. In the 'memory games' it will be realized that the activity is not just a simple memory practice but also a kind of brain training process. In the activity 'setting the scene' there will not be lack of motivation anymore. The learners will gain confidence to use the target language with the help of poems. This activity will encourage teacher to be more creative and to use a more powerful method on teaching.

During the humor activity it will be seen how effective tool humor is in education as there will be smiling faces in class which will help learning in a warm environment. The participation of shy students will increase too. With the help of these activities the students will be learning new literary terms and see them in the poems. In the activity of writing acrostic poems they will create their own poems. They will be searching ways to find brainstorm words or phrases to describe their classmates which are fun and easy to write. The ideas will develop their world of imagination too.

Poetry and poems have not been favored much in language classrooms and teachers have not considered the benefits of using poetry in teaching the language (Çetinavcı and Tütüniş, 2012).

According to Maley and Duff (1989) poetry is also a great source of authentic material and of input. As such, it should be given as much credit for helping foreign language acquisition as any other source (Dzhukelov, 2013:8).

Poetry educates the imagination by making us look fresh at the primary world through the power and vision of its secondary creations (Benton, 1990:28). Poetry is an exceptional learning tool that can be used to make connections with students in order to build a trusting relationship between teacher and student. It provides opportunity to bridge the underlying gap between adult and child. More so, poetry helps build an

atmosphere of trust and safety within the classroom amongst students (Bournazakis, 2013:8). In order for a poetry unit to be successful it is necessary for the teacher to create an atmosphere that is respectful of one another right from the beginning. Once students feel safe, they will become engaged in the lessons (Bournazakis, 2013:18).

Poetry may not seem attractive to the learners in language classes because of some reasons such as: Students may not be interested in reading or studying poems. They may feel shy to read in class or they may not have enough motivation. Teachers may not have developed beneficial ways to teach it in class, it may be considered too hard by students, or they may be unaware of the ways to make it fun in class. So the role of using poems in language teaching has great importance. It develops the learners' perceptions and intellectual pictures. For this reason some activities have been searched to offer several ways of adopting them into poetry. The teachers should be potentially creative to discover new ways to teach poetry in the frame of methodology by using technological facilitations. These methods will open new windows to horizons and poetry will not bring boredom or be a burden on students. They will arise students' interest in poetry and literature. As the learners start having fun in poetry their power of imagination and self-confidence will increase. They will also realize the use of the language. Since the poet's weaving the words skillfully gives pleasure to the reader, this pleasure must be considered as an advantage in teaching English as a foreign language. So teachers have to discover some activities to make poems seem more attractive in their English classes. For example, in an English text book, it is possible to see a sentence which says 'He is smiling because he is happy.' Can it be effective enough for the student to remember it for a long time? Does the sentence have a strong effect on the learner's mind? But if the sentence is 'You're my only reason to smile.' as it is used in the poem below, it will be more meaningful in the context. So some activities are presented below to encourage the teachers to urge to find more activities while teaching poems in English classes. From this point of view we can say that poetry can't be a treadmill but a strong means of teaching English.

Sample activities to teach English by using a poem

Activity 1

Substitution Drills

Below a sample poem called 'Is it love?' has been chosen to study (Diril, 2016). Some lines from this poem are:

Is it love?

I can't breathe in this blind alley,
As if in a dream in this endless valley.
I wonder if it is what they call love.

Feelings can't be expressed, words are weak.
I can't breathe in this blind alley,
I wonder if it is what they call love.

You're my only reason to smile.
Let me hug you for a while.
I wonder if it is what they call love.

A kiss would excite me so much.
I would get burnt with a soft touch.
I wonder if it is what they call love.

My tongue slips, I can't talk.
Hand in hand how can we walk?
I wonder if it is what they call love.

Talking to you, I see time flies.
I would be lost in your brown eyes.
I wonder if it is what they call love.

Description of the activity

Poems can be used to offer or practice new vocabulary and language structures. The teacher picks up a few words such as adjectives, nouns or verbs from the lines of the poem to study. After underlining these words, he asks learners to replace them with some other possible words to make changes in the poem to create a warm environment.

To practice the activity, the teacher picks up these sample lines from the poem above.

- 1) I can't breathe in this blind alley.
- 2) I wonder if it is what they call love.
- 3) You're my only reason to smile.
- 4) I would get burnt with a soft touch.
- 5) Hand in hand how can we walk?
- 6) I would be lost in your brown eyes.

Students are free to use dictionaries during this activity. The teacher forms small groups of students to carry out the activity. If it is a small class it can be done individually too. The learners search new options for the underlined words of the poem. This will give them a good opportunity to have new sets of adjectives and verbs here. They will be exchanging ideas with each other by asking if the sentence will be meaningful or not with the new found word. After some time the teacher asks them to read their sentences in their new forms. Each student reads the line of the poem with his own changes. It will give them an opportunity to study vocabulary and synonyms too.

Aim of the activity: With the help of this activity the learners will have the chance to produce lots of new sentences using the new words. For example; studying 6th sentence, they will be revising the color of eyes. Studying 3rd one, they will be practicing new verbs by having fun in class. They will be competing with each other to make more and more sentences for stimulation. The grammar will be supported with the examples by repeating the similar sentences in the same structure over and over again. They will have tendency to read more poetry too.

Activity 2

Group Competition (by using Grammar-translation approach)

Description of the activity

The teacher divides the class into groups of 4 or 5 appointing a secretary to each one. Then he reflects the poem on the board with a projector. The students work in groups to translate the poem into their mother tongue. They may consult to their dictionaries if necessary. The teacher gives them some limited time and they start translating the poem cooperating with each other. When the time is over, the secretaries come to the board one by one to start reading their translated lines. At the end of the procedure the teacher evaluates the works.

Materials to use: Dictionaries and a projector.

The aim of this activity:

It will give the students a chance to work in groups. They will be enriching their vocabulary and revising grammar in detailed explanations of the teacher or group members when necessary. This will also motivate them for further study of poems in learning English as a foreign language.

Since translation gives students the chance to practice the lexical, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic and stylistic knowledge they have acquired in other courses, translation both as an application area covering four basic skills and as the fifth skill is emphasized in language teaching (Hişmanoğlu, 2005).

Activity 3**Memory game (using the direct method)**

Memorization is a useful pedagogical tool especially regarding poetry. It is not as some say a "rote exercise". On the contrary, memorization allows the students to 'feel' and experience language. It is a profound source of 'spiritual nourishment (Panavelil, 2011:11).

There will not be focus on grammar, mother tongue or translation in this activity because of using the direct method. The students will not see or have a printed version of the poem either.

Description of the activity

The teacher invites some volunteers to the board. Optionally up to 9 students can be chosen for this activity. They stand in front of the board next to each other. The teacher reads the first line of the poem once to the first student and requests him to tell it back. As a sample study here the poem called 'Is it love?' has been chosen again.

First student repeats: I can't breathe in this blind alley.

Then the teacher reads the first two lines of the poem. So;

The second student repeats:

I can't breathe in this blind alley.

As if in a dream in this endless valley.

Then the teacher reads the first three lines of the poem. So;

The third student reads the first three lines of the poem:

I can't breathe in this blind alley.

As if in a dream in this endless valley,

I wonder if it is what they call love.

The procedure goes on like this for the next lines. The rule of the game is whenever a student cannot remember his lines he will be out of the game. The elimination process will go on. Whoever remembers all the lines the teacher reads and tells them back will be the winner of the game.

With the help of this activity memorization practices will form a warm atmosphere in teaching English letting the learners feel more hopeful for the next studies.

Activity 4

Setting the scene

This activity, in a way, is similar to suggestopedia which is a teaching strategy which is based on a modern understanding of how the human brain works and how we learn most effectively. It was originally applied mainly in foreign language teaching, and it is often claimed that it can teach languages approximately three times as quickly as conventional methods (Venkanna, 2005, as cited in Richards J.C. and Rodgers T.S., 1986).

Materials to use: Music player, a carnation, a picture of a cage and heart.

Description of the activity

It is possible to use innovative suggestopedia strategy in poetry while teaching a foreign language. To set the scene, first of all a relaxing music is required in the background so that the learners can get rid of their stress and feel in good mood which will strengthen their mind. There should not be any distractions so environment should be as cozy as possible. As an option the teacher may bring some pictures of the materials which are mentioned in the poem. A picture of a heart and a cage can be a good example for this poem. Then they are asked to breathe in and out to feel physically relaxed and happy. Optionally, some red carnations can be brought to the class beforehand. Students may be asked to imagine themselves in a garden or somewhere near the sea to set the scene. The teacher starts playing the music and reads the poem as they listen to it their eyes closed. Here the teacher spreads impressive motivation in a positive style. After this receptive phase is over, the students read the poem in pairs too. While reading the poem they work in cooperation with each other, they may suggest or pretend to be giving carnations to each other to bring some romance to the class. This activity will also stimulate their interest in further reading sessions. A warm atmosphere should be created so that students can participate freely without being afraid of mistakes. This activity will also help learners develop some connections with the content and form positive reflections of learning.

As a sample study the poem called 'Red Carnation' is chosen (Diril, 2017).

Red Carnation

No one but you can cheer me up.
You are my only consolation.
You are my first and last station.
Here in my hand is a red carnation.
Take it before it dies.

Accept it as a memory of the day.
Don't go away, next to me, stay.
You know you are my addiction.
You are my dream, my fiction.
Here in my hand is a red carnation.
Take it before it dies.

You are in each of my heart beat.
I wish you were not so sweet.
You are my nightingale in my heart cage.
You are the best poem on my life page.
Here in my hand is a red carnation.
Take it before it dies.

Activity 5**Humor with words**

Description of the activity

The teacher asks students to draw a chart on their notebooks. At the top of the chart they write titles such as adjectives, nouns, verbs and animals like the one below. Then they write their related words under these headings.

Adjectives	Nouns	Verbs	Animals
horrible	pencil	sleep	cat
ugly	table	dance	horse
dangerous	melon	jump	bird
sad	car	play	butterfly

Then any part of the poem is written on the board with some missing words and the teacher asks students to put their words from the chart in the blanks and read the lines aloud to the class. Students are supposed to write adjectives, nouns, verbs or names of animals as shown in parentheses below. As the sentences will look nonsense or funny it will warm the class and bring laughter to make studying English with poems more enjoyable. Then the learners will be given the original poem to see the difference.

The sample lines of the poem for the students to complete.	A possible sample of lines of a student with the substituted words.
You are in each of my heart beat. I wish you were not so(adjective). You are my (noun) heart cage. You are the best poem on my life page. Here in my hand is a red(noun) Take it before it(verb)	You are in each of my heart beat. I wish you were not so <i>ugly</i> You are my <i>horse</i> in my heart cage. You are the best poem on my life page. Here in my hand is a red <i>melon</i> Take it before it <i>jumps</i> .

With the help of this activity there will be humor in class to break the ice to make language learning easier. Humor plays an important role in second language or foreign language learning as English and is an integral part of second language teaching and learning classroom environment. It is a very skillful way of motivating those students who are demotivated, showing no interest in English language classes due to various factors like lack of confidence, anxiety factor, language ego, shyness, hesitation and nervousness (Shumaila and Javed, 2015).

Activity 6**Activity to teach literary terms:**

Poetry offers wonderful opportunities for teaching literary terms too. To do this activity, first of all some literary terms are taught in class and then students are asked to read a sample poem like the one below and find these terms in it. The poem called 'It was you.' has been chosen as a sample study down (Diril, 2007).

It was you!

The star of my nights.
It was your eyes!
The sun that lights,
All my world, all sides.
But now, it's over.
All is over now.
It was my love that used to flow
through the green eyes like a river.

It was my love that used to flow
from the sweetest two lips,
Not just two lips but tulips
that grew in my heart.
I remember yesterday just like today
when we were hand in hand.
See me now, crying and sad.
Again it is me at the end.
Just a broken heart all I have.
Just repentance all I have.

Never never can you guess dear,
How thankful I am to you anyway,
As you already let me taste the death
For it will be easy for me
To taste the real death.

Possible answers can be like these:

Sample 1. Sample for 'Irony' which is the use of words that is opposite of its literal meaning. In these lines there is an irony, because the poet is not really thankful to the lover, on the contrary he is resentful.

How thankful I am to you anyway.
As you already let me taste the death.
For it will be easy for me
to taste the real death.

Sample 2. Sample for 'Simile' which is a figure of speech in which two unlike things are explicitly compared as in the lines of:

'It was my love that used to flow
through the green eyes like a river.'

Sample 3. Sample for 'metaphor' which is a figure of speech in which a term or phrase is applied to something to which it is not literally applicable in order to suggest a resemblance, as in:

It was you!
The star of my nights.

Sample 4. Sample for 'rhyme' which is the correspondence of sound between words or the endings of words, especially when these are used at the end of the lines of poetry.

In this poem students are expected to find the samples for rhyming such as: Nights, lights, hand, sand and end. This activity can also be practiced by drawing a simple chart like this below saying 'match the lines with the right literary terms.'

a	Irony	1	How thankful I am to you anyway, As you already let me taste the death.
b	Simile	2	It was my love that used to flow Through the green eyes like a river.
c	Metaphor	3	It was you! The star of my nights.
d	Rhyme	4	Nights, lights, hand, sand, end.

This activity will provide learners a chance to revise and think about the previously learned literary terms. They will be looking forward to produce more lines with literary terms in poetry to help develop English language by being more concentrated on the poem. It will also be helping them to express their feelings for others by making lot of similar sentences to reveal their hidden inner word which will also give the teacher an opportunity to know more about his students.

Activity 7

Group Competition (Put the lines in order)

Materials to use: Slices of colored paper, a chronometer.

Below a sample poem called 'Ella' 'chosen to study (Diril, 2017).

(Line 1) I said 'hi' to a new morning,
 (Line 2) With some storm in my heart,
 (Line 3) Feeling sad, feeling desolate.
 (Line 4) Day has no meaning without you.
 (Line 5) I care not if it is early or late.

Description of the activity

Groups are formed in class and each group chooses a name for themselves. The teacher writes each line of the poem on a slip of paper and randomly puts it on the table. He also has a chronometer to measure the time.

A secretary comes to the board, writes the group names on the board and waits there to write the completion time of each group. Then the teacher calls the groups in order. He recites the poem aloud once or twice as they listen to him carefully. Then he asks the members start putting the lines in order. They work together and complete the work. The teacher checks his chronometer to measure how much time they spent to do it. The secretary writes the time under the group name and the next groups is called to the board for the same action and it goes like this with different poems. The winning group may be rewarded. This activity will cause a competitive atmosphere to help forming cooperation among students in a peaceful and fun environment.

With the help of this study the learners will revise the grammar in the poem, develop their vocabulary, and have a chance to express their feelings freely being more courageous. They will learn to work in cooperation with other members and have fun at the same time.

Activity 8

Writing acrostic poem for each other

Description of the activity

The teacher asks students write acrostic poems for their classmates. There should not be restriction on the line length of the poem. This activity is a good opportunity for them to express what they think about each other which will create a fun and warm atmosphere while learning to make it more memorable. It will develop the soul of group work by reading face to face, increase their interest in poetry. Creating their own poems will motivate them and increase their self-confidence. After completing their poems they can read them aloud in front of their friends. Reading poems aloud will improve their oral language skills, confidence and reading fluency. It will also give them the chance to increase their comfort level. As an extra motivation, the students can be asked to write

their poems on colorful sheets and hang on the school walls so that the rest of the students can read them.

As a sample study a poem called 'Sylvie' is chosen (Diril, 2009).

Sylvie

Set me free from my chains.
Yellow roses on my desk are to fade.

Late night here I stayed.
Vagabond thoughts invaded me all.
I know black will turn into white when
Early days of us knock on the door again.

Activity 9

Writing and drawing activity: Creating a short story about the poem with a picture.

Materials to use: Crayons and paper to draw on.

Description of the activity

The teacher writes the poem on the board and starts a discussion about the title and content of it. After this short entrance he asks students to imagine and write a short story about it and draw a picture on a paper describing the scene.

He also writes some stimulating questions to be answered during the story writing part such as: Why and where was this poem written? What time was it? What did he think about his lover?

After the writing is over they are asked to read their writing aloud and show their pictures to their classmates.

A sample short writing about the poem 'Sylvie' can be like this.

It is a Sunday night and the writer is sitting in his room alone. He feels confused but he is hopeful too. There are some roses on his table.

Aim of the activity: With the help of this activity the foreign language learners will have the chance to develop their vocabulary and world of imagination. The class will be out of its monotonous atmosphere revealing the childhood in each learner with their simple drawings which will cause coziness. It will also connect the learners during the activity and increase their writing abilities.

Conclusion

Poetry is a kind of writing which shows the power of the language. With skillfully selected vocabulary the poetry expresses lots of things, reaches the depth of the heart and mind. The poet forms a connection with the readers (Kaya, 2013:92).

This article focused on the importance of using poetry in teaching English as a foreign language by presenting activities to help teachers have a warm atmosphere with poems. When a positive environment is formed students will learn and engage more which is a powerful tool.

The presented activities enhance studying poetry in English classes by bringing freedom and warm atmosphere which creates a tie of trust and respect between students. This study showed that different warm up activities or games could be created according to the level of the learners. It also showed that poetry has positive effect on the students'

motivation which brings color to the class and develops their critical abilities. With the help of these activities, the learners will get rid of psychological obstacles like nervousness, fatigue, etc.

The use of these activities will help students to learn what they are really interested in. As a result of conducting this article, I propose that each teacher should pull a planned activity out of his bag of tricks to set the tone in poetry, set a positive learning environment and serve as a springboard into the next classes. As using poems correctly and efficiently in acquiring a language has great importance, this process should be planned well with the help of some class activities. Poetry should not be taught for the sake of doing nothing in teaching English, it should certainly have some other objectives such as helping teaching grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, writing, developing imagination and way of thinking, enriching the cultural awareness, speaking by forming a warm learning atmosphere with the help of the games or other class activities. By using and developing these activities it will be realized that poetry can help students develop their oral language abilities, fluency in speech and writing too.

The learner should not be restricted only to the text books with limited activities, on the contrary he should be provided with rich substitution drills to use his imagination more in class. With randomly the help of these activities it will be seen that motivation as an important key factor in language learning will influence the percentage and success of foreign language learning.

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