# CONFIDENTLY USING LITERATURE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND STUDENTS' VOICES

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"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the age of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way…"

Charles Dickens, *A Tale of two cities*

# Why use literature with the learners? An overview of teachers and students' beliefs

- ☐ It is a motivating authentic material
- ☐ It provides learners with access to the culture of the people whose language they are studying
- ☐ It encourages language acquisition – contextualisation
- ☐ It develops students' interpretative abilities
- ☐ It educates students by serving a wider educational function
- ☐ It expands students' language awareness

- A. A grief ago                                                (Dylan Thomas, *A Grief Ago*)

- B. …a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens…      (Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby, p.29*)

- C. *Though wedded we have been*

  *These Twice ten tedious years…*

                    (Cowper's The Diverting History of John Gilpin)

# Selecting a literary text: Issues of difficulty and level

- Linguistic difficulty
- Length difficulty
- Cultural difficulty
- Referential difficulties
- Conceptual difficulties

# Applying criteria for text selection

- Is the subject matter likely to interest the learners?

- Is the language level about right?

- Is it of the right length for the time available?

- Does it require extensive cultural or literary background knowledge?

- Is it culturally accessible? Is there anything culturally offensive?

- Can it be used for language learning purposes?

# Setting the scene by varying the levels of difficulty

- ☐ Level 1: Simple text + low level task
- ☐ Level 2: Simple text + more demanding task
- ☐ Level 3: Difficult text + low level task
- ☐ Level 4: Difficult text + more demanding task

# Teachers' perceptions/attitudes

- ☐ Teachers are overwhelmingly in favour of using literary texts in language teaching
- ☐ Teachers consider novels as the most attractive and appropriate form of literature to be used for language teaching
- ☐ Teachers believe that students can be greatly benefited by the exposure to the wider educational functions of literature (stimulate their imagination, develop critical abilities, increase emotional awareness)
- ☐ Teachers see literature as an invaluable and constructive authentic material, not fashioned for language teaching purposes, therefore offering abundant authentic samples of language in use
- ☐ Teachers believe that literature is effective in promoting intercultural understanding

# Teachers' beliefs on the benefits of literature use in language programmes:

a) Development of students' critical and interpretative abilities.

b) Expression of ideas and emotions in English.

c) Language enrichment

d) Attracts students' interest and leads to incidental language learning.

e) Provides further language practice (e.g., speaking, writing and reading).

# Teachers' beliefs regarding language practice.

☐ Language enrichment:

a) Contextualisation (e.g., use novels for exemplification of grammar rules).

b) Familiarity with various linguistic clues.

c) Exposure to figurative language.

d) Use words/phrases in unfamiliar ways/contexts.

e) Words transcend their fixed dictionary definition.

# Students' perceptions/attitudes

- Similar to teachers' perceptions, the students see the benefits of using literature for language teaching

- Students also show an analogous preference towards using novels for language teaching purposes

- Students demonstrate an increased awareness on the linguistic engagement and language practice of all four language skills through the implementation of novels

- Students value novels as a motivating authentic material which can positively affect learning English as an L2

- Students recognise the novels' contribution in contextualising the cultural background, commenting on their importance in creating the conditions for a vivid representation of cultural experiences

# Students' reasons for reading literature:

- Provides linguistic engagement (e.g., vocabulary enrichment, grammar practice, improves spelling and syntax).

- Motivating.

- Personal engagement (engage imaginatively, relate to the characters).

- Cultural enrichment.

- Further educational opportunities.