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Susan Glaspell's "Trifles": A Suggested Lesson Plan

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Abstract. While teaching, a plan will enable a teacher to present his lesson in a smooth way. Being familiar with the text you intend to teach is not enough. As an experienced teacher, I introduce this plan as a model that might be adopted and modified according to the surrounding circumstances a teacher may find her/himself in. A lot of things may interfere in and cause some changes such as time limit, number of students, their level, etc. Hence, instead of leaving all things for luck and chances, I propose this lesson plan, hoping that colleagues and readers ponder it and consider using it.

Keywords. lesson plan, teacher, literature, "Trifles"

Introduction

This lesson plan is intended for EN 000: Introductory Literature Course for non-native students. First of all, such a plan should include a detailed description of what will happen in a class stating objectives, materials needed, activities, procedures, conclusion, and assessment (evaluation). This plan is intended to help the teacher to be organized and prepared for teaching the text in question. However, this plan may be adjusted in class in order to meet students' needs enrolled in such a class and to accommodate class progress. By the way, this plan might be adopted and adjusted to fit teaching any other close-featured title.

Objectives

After reading Susan Glaspell's "Trifles", intended students will show a general understanding of this one-act play by participating in the class discussion, answering various questions, and writing different critical reports. The students will become familiar of how to apply dramatic terms to the play, such as round and flat characters, plot, structure, setting and tone, etc. Part of the discussion will address some themes like male-female relationship, individuality, oppression, and gender; society and region may interfere in deciding what type of themes could be included. Also a teacher needs to talk about the play's historical and social context: how the play's two characters' behaviour and troubles reflect that period's disturbances and how readers can learn some lessons from a literary text like the one in question.

Materials

Students should read Susan Glaspell's "Trifles". For beginners, an instructor may try to read the play or at least some long quotations in class. "Trifles" is a short play about killing a husband. A couple of women "hide the evidence against her [the wife] and she is spared the punishment for killing her husband" (Wikipedia). Coming to class, the students should bring

the text with them for they need to refer to and/or quote from the text. They have to bring their notebooks because they may need to write some notes from what will be going on in the class. Some teachers prefer asking their students at the end of the lesson to write and/or answer some questions about what they have learnt in the class. Of course, no one is supposed to come to class without a pen and a piece of paper. On the other hand, the board could be used whenever needed, particularly while explaining some terms and writing some important statements.

Participation

Students' participation is imperative. In this plan, the students are at the center of learning. This plan is intended to encourage them to express their ideas. This activity does not necessarily mean that the students should like the play; they might like some parts or none at all. The point here is that each student is to tell his/her opinion about the play and why he/she thinks so. As soon as the students stop their discussion, the instructor is to pose a question to return the class back to the topic and/or to draw their attention to an important point or idea. However, if the students know that they should participate in the class discussion, they will come to their class prepared. Anyhow, sometimes the teacher has to push them to do so by asking them in person to answer specific questions.

Activities:

1. Warm up (5-7 minutes);
2. Question/discussion (20-24 min.);
3. Brief lecture (7-9 min.);
4. Writing a journal report (10 min.);
5. Conclusion (8-10 min.).

Methods/Procedures

This lesson plan consists of different teaching techniques: question/discussion, a brief lecture, a brief journal report, and a cooperative learning homework assignment. These varieties of techniques are meant to assure the students' learning and to overcome boredom in the class. --Entering the class, a teacher should greet his/her students. Then, s/he circulates an attendance sheet asking everyone to sign his/her name serially. Or s/he calls attendance if a list of students is available. After signing their names or calling names, the instructor should state the sequence of planned activities and write the main points on the board if needed. Then, s/he gives a brief introduction about the author in question; emphasis might be given to background, education, and interests. This introduction will take between 7-9 minutes.

--After that, discussion should start. The students might be asked a question like, "What do you think of this play?" At this moment, the instructor gives them a chance to express their opinions, to talk in front of each other, and to comment on each other's statements; this way will permit them to explore ideas on their own way. In other words, instructors are to create a learning milieu in their classes. This will lead the whole class to talk about the plot, characters, structure, and how these elements relate to each other. Whenever the discussion stops, the instructor could pose a question or ask them to start discussing a relevant or new idea. If some students are not engaged in the discussion, they shouldn't be left behind; they may be pushed forward by asking them personally if necessary. The instructor asks those students a question such as: "You read the play, so what do you think of so and so?" However, at the beginning questions will be general like the above ones. Later, questions will get in deep water; one may pose questions like: What are the serious problems that this one-act play deals with? And how does the play solve and/or handle these problems? Then, there will be specific questions such as: What do

Mrs. Wright's actions at the start tell you about her? What does her behavior indicate? What social and personal difficulties is Mrs. Wright experiencing? How and why does she want to escape living with Mr. Wright? Questions like these ones will be raised and the instructor ought to encourage students to have their questions that will enrich the discussion. This discussion is intended to take between 20-24 minutes; this indeed depends on the levels of the students and their knowledge of the language—one may need more time. For those students who are studying English as a foreign language as it is the case with me in Saudi Arabia, the instructor may need few classes to make their issues clear for students.

--Then, it is the instructor's turn to wrap up what has been going on in the class. Wrapping-up should be a habit; the instructor should summarize and refer to the main points discussed in the class in question. A conclusion may go as follows: Although "Trifles" is a short play, it deals with serious problems: the difficulties of adjustment to marriage, misconceptions about social problems, unfulfilled dreams, general individual troubles that reflect the disturbances of the period in question. Those points might be elaborated depending on the goals listed for the course and the discussion that took place in the class. This brief wrap-up will take 7-9 minutes.

--After that, the instructor may ask students to write in their journals what they have learnt in this class in no less than half a page. Of course, they have to write the title of the play and the date on the top of the page. When s/he has a chance to look at their journals, s/he will see what they have written and could comment on their journals at any time. What is meant here is to reinforce their understanding of the play through writing in their notebooks. If they face any difficulty, they will have a chance and be encouraged to ask questions in the future. And the teacher's help should be provided whenever they need it. They can write half a page in less than 10 minutes. This activity is intended to give those who want to ask questions a chance to ask. At the same time, some students may need more time to write their log. Others may add critical ideas that require some careful consideration.

Conclusion

Students might be divided into groups of three or two in order to keep everything under control. Later on, the teacher is to write on the board or say (depending on understanding and being able to hear him/her in a clear way) statements like the following:

- Literature consists of hidden moral messages.
- Literature is universal, expressive of transcultural truths.
- Literature is an historical document that draws attention to look at a specific period.

By the way these are examples. Some other statements might be added depending on the discussion and interests the teacher is going to notice in the class. Each group is to think of one statement and apply it to the play. Each group is to bring a one-page report to the next class. The purpose of this assignment is that the students can learn more from each other. It is expected that each student, including those who have been absent, should participate in the group discussion because it is a way to learn from each other. However, each group is to write the names of its members on the top of the page-report. Then, the teacher should remind the students of what they have to read for the next class. At the end of this class, s/he wishes them a nice, beautiful day.

Evaluation

Evaluation of this lesson plan will be based on class participation in the discussion, students' answers to questions, students' journal reports, and the groups' reports to the next class. In class, the instructor is to run the discussion and try to make it meet the stated objectives of this lesson plan. S/he answers the students' questions in the class. In the next meeting,

groups' reports should be submitted. Later, after reading the reports, s/he is expected to correct any kind of misunderstanding in class so that other students will benefit from learning their colleagues' mistakes. By the way, there is no need to name those who have had the mistakes. Whenever there is a chance, the instructor may read some parts of the reports for the whole class. S/he may write some comments on them if necessary before allowing students to have their reports back.

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