

LITERATURE IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

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Why literature ?

In the past five years there has developed a—one hesitates to call it a movement—but a definite literature seems to have proliferated on the subject of teaching English second language students English by using poetry, fiction and drama. As Maley and Duff (1989) have written in the introduction to their book on teaching poetry, there has grown a dissatisfaction with the communicative method which sometimes has the tendency of trivializing content and which has also drawn “attention away from anything which did not seem to have a practical purpose.” Continuing with further criticisms of contemporary materials selection, they comment :

“Poetry[literature]offers a rich resource for input to language learning. As such it is at least as relevant as the more commonly accepted types of input (e.g. contrived dialogues, isolated texts for reading comprehension, simulations, etc.). So it should be given at least equal weight.” (introduction, pg. 7).

In a very interesting article on the same subject, Tomlinson (1986) gives a lucid account of the ways in which poetry can be used in the EFL classroom. He feels that poetry is especially useful for its :

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- 1) *educational value*—it has the capacity to tap emotional, imaginative and intellectual development.
- 2) *affective value*—when the focus is on CONTENT rather than FORM, many students can make valid responses and also gain a sense of achievement—these are important motivational factors.
- 3) *individual value*—poetry, by its very nature, is apprehended on a very personal level and each individual's response to it is valid for that person. Thus, even the least proficient students can respond to poetry on its broadest level. As Maley and Duff assert, there is a universality about poetry—it is language use that exists in all human cultures in one form or another (i.e., written or oral). The themes of poetry are also universal to all cultures—love, death, loneliness, religious experience, observation of nature.
- 4) *stimulus value*—poetry can elicit emotional responses which in turn can enable students to use their language intelligently and with creativity—this in turn can sometimes lead to a sense of pride and achievement.

Tomlinson also feels that through poetry students will be able to develop important skills. He stresses the point that because of the ambiguity of poetry—this can be said of almost all literature—using poetry as authentic materials in the EFL classroom can help students to become, among other things, adept at deducing meaning from opaque language. It can also help students to develop the ability to predict—tapping their world knowledge. And it can help them to respond to

reading texts creatively.

Collie and Slater (1987), in their resource book of ideas and activities for teaching literature in the classroom echo all of what Tomlinson has said and add further that literature is :

“...bountiful and[*it offers an*]extremely varied body of written material which is ‘important’ in the sense that it says something about fundamental human issues, and which is enduring rather than ephemeral.” (pg. 3)

Collie and Slater also point out that literature is ‘authentic’. This is an issue that has received a lot of attention in the literature on communicative teaching. They point out that literature has not been fashioned to be specifically used for purposes of teaching language to non-native language learners. Collie and Slater also point out that for many EFL students, literature is a doorway through which one can apprehend another culture. This is an ancient idea—one reads the literature of another language or culture to gain an insight into the particular psyche of that speech community or culture. There has perhaps been too much of an emphasis on the similarities of cultures or the universality of human experience in the teaching philosophies of those of us who are products of a liberal, democratic, Western educational system, and not enough recognition of the uniqueness of cultures or individual experience. Maley and Duff (1989) write that certain kinds of teaching materials may seem “overly committed”—we have all seen examples of such texts—relentlessly glum accounts of child abuse, rape, drug addiction, homelessness, ecological disaster. These are not unworthy subjects for study, but there is often a subliminal ‘missionary’ zeal to this type

of material that is disturbing in its 'politically correct' stance. On the other hand we all have seen texts that go in the opposite direction—where content is trivialized so that specific forms of language can be explicitly highlighted.

It may seem from the above that this writer and the authors cited above see literature as the only viable source of materials to be used in the EFL classroom. This is not the case. The approach that has so far been discussed, does not seek as its purpose to teach literature, but to use literary texts as a resource for stimulating language activities. For many native-speakers of English, 'Literature' is seen as a once threatening, difficult, tortuous and painful memory from past educational experience. Thus, it seldom is thought to be an appropriate subject for non-native language learners. The argument that has so far been presented here is a call for a reassessment of what is considered appropriate as material for use with EFL learners. This is not to say that tasks which involve interpreting timetables or selecting the best tour from a travel agency pamphlet are of no value. What is meant is that totally neglecting literature as a source of authentic material is to stress only the interactional (the social lubricant side of language) or the transactional (the message side of language). Literature can add, as Maley and Duff (1989) point out, another dimension—the "reactional"—the purpose of which is to make people "react personally to other people's ways of seeing things." (introduction, pg. 10). Widdowson (1992) concurs with this point of view: "What is important...is not the interpretation itself but the process of exploration of meaning..." (introduction, pg. xiv).

APPENDIX

Example unit

What follows is an example of teacher-created materials of language activities that use literature—a poem by the British poet Stevie Smith—as the basis for a unit on descriptive language, in this case description of a place. The unit is not meant to stand as a perfected, completed entity. It is meant to be a stimulus for teachers who wish to attempt to periodically use literature in their classrooms. These activities have yet to be tested with real students—so whatever follows must be seen as a tentative step. Perhaps some of the activities are over-ambitious, some under-specified—ultimately, though the purpose of this example unit is to show other teachers that it is possible to come up with creative activities that can engage students and at the same time deal with material and themes that have been previously thought too difficult for any but the most advanced students.

The materials were designed with an intermediate, perhaps second-year, 'Eibungaku' writing course student-audience in mind. Since the materials are untested it is difficult to gauge the time it would take to complete these activities. In any case there are an over-abundance of activities which were provided for the purpose of showing the future teacher materials-writer one teacher's first attempts at writing materials using authentic, accessible literary language.

To distinguish the material only the teacher will have access to, text is printed in capitals. Material that is meant for the students is printed in normal script.

[THE STEVIE SMITH POEM IS PROVIDED HERE SO THAT THE TEACHER MAY SEE HOW THE ACTIVITIES THAT THE STUDENTS WILL BE ENGAGED IN HAVE THEIR ORIGIN IN THE SUBJECT MATTER AND TONE OF THE POEM, BUT IT IS PREFERABLE THAT THE STUDENTS DO NOT MEET WITH THE POEM ITSELF UNTIL THE PRE-READING ACTIVITIES ARE GONE THROUGH.]

NUMBERS

A thousand and fifty-one waves

Two hundred and thirty-one seagulls

A cliff of four hundred feet

Three miles of ploughed fields

One house

Four windows look on the waves

Four windows look on the ploughed fields

One skylight looks on the sky

In that skylight's sky is one seagull.

(MacGibbon, 1975, pg. 32-33)

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES :

1) YOU MIGHT START OUT BY EXPLAINING TO THE STUDENTS THAT BEFORE THEY ACTUALLY LISTEN TO/READ TODAY'S LITERARY SELECTION, THEY WILL BE TAKEN THROUGH A NUMBER OF ACTIVITIES TO SENSITIZE THEM

TO THE IDEAS AND IMAGES THAT WILL BE MET WITH IN THE POEM ITSELF. THESE ACTIVITIES WILL CONCENTRATE ON CONTENT NOT ON LANGUAGE AND THAT THE BEST WAY TO APPROACH THESE ACTIVITIES IS WITH A SENSE OF PLAYFULNESS AND IMAGINATION :

A poem by Stevie Smith

Before we look at today's literary selection, there are a number of activities that are planned to help you to use your imagination. Please try to do these activities in a playful way—that was the kind of poet Stevie Smith was. She would want you to have fun reading her poems. (If you are interested to know : Stevie Smith was a British poet. She began writing poetry in the 1930's and continued writing until her death in 1971. Poetry is believed to be very difficult and many people do not like to read modern poetry. However, Stevie Smith was a very popular poet in Britain. She was popular with people who generally never read poetry. Some of her poems are very short and very funny. Some of her other poems are very strange and sad. Today's poem is one of her short poems, and it is very easy to understand.)

1)

THIS ACTIVITY IS MEANT TO GET STUDENTS TO THINK ABOUT PHYSICAL SPACE AND TO ALSO THINK ABOUT HOW TO DESCRIBE A PANORAMIC SCENE, THE SUBJECT OF THE STEVIE SMITH POEM THAT IS THE FOCUS OF THIS UNIT.

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THE DESCRIPTION IS A RATHER PROSAIC ONE AND IF THERE IS TIME OR INCLINATION, PERHAPS A MORE VIVID DESCRIPTION OF A PLACE COULD BE FOUND FROM OTHER SOURCES. ASK STUDENTS TO LISTEN TO THE DESCRIPTION AND TO VISUALIZE THE SETTING. TELL STUDENTS THAT YOU ARE GOING TO READ A DESCRIPTION WRITTEN IN A RECENT SHORT NOTE YOU RECEIVED FROM A FRIEND, ABOUT THE VIEW FROM THE HOUSE SHE JUST MOVED INTO. THIS HOUSE IS LOCATED IN THE OUTER SUBURBS ('DENENTOSHI') OF TOKYO :

Pre-reading activity 1

"Dear (teacher's name) ;

we recently moved into a lovely, old, traditional style house in the Chichibu area, as you know. It is at the top of a high hill and not too far from the train station, to the south. It feels like the country, yet it is only one hour away from central Tokyo on the Seibu Line ! A small untouched woods is about five hundred meters to the west on a lower hill. It always smells so fresh here. There are many windows on the second floor ; it's so bright and airy. And from these windows you can see clearly in every direction. If you stand at the children's bedroom window, which faces east, you can see for a number of kilometers. Please come and visit us in our new home.

Your old friend,

Aya

QUESTIONS COULD BE ASKED ABOUT THE ABOVE DESCRIPTION, SUCH AS :

“DO YOU THINK THIS SOUNDS LIKE A NICE PLACE?”,
“WOULD YOU LIKE TO LIVE HERE?” “CAN YOU TELL HOW MY FRIEND FEELS ABOUT HER NEW HOME?” “ARE THERE ANY WORDS IN THE SHORT NOTE THAT TELL YOU SHE EITHER LIKES OR DISLIKES THIS PLACE?”

2)

NOW TELL THE STUDENTS THAT YOU ARE GOING TO READ THE PASSAGE AGAIN AND THEY ARE TO TRY TO DRAW A ROUGH PICTURE OF YOUR DESCRIPTION. THIS IS NOT AS TAXING AS IT MAY SEEM, SINCE JAPANESE STUDENTS OFTEN HAVE SUPERB DRAWING SKILLS. THE DRAWING WILL NECESSARILY HAVE TO BE ROUGH BECAUSE THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH DETAILS PROVIDED.

Pre-reading activity 2

[SPACE FOR DRAWING A PICTURE]

AFTER YOU HAVE REREAD THE DESCRIPTION A SECOND TIME, AND THE STUDENTS HAVE FINISHED WITH THEIR ROUGH DRAWINGS, WALK AROUND THE CLASS PRAISING THE CLARITY/IMAGINATION/HUMOR, ETC. OF THE DRAWINGS. PERHAPS ONE OR TWO STUDENTS COULD BE SINGLED

OUT TO SHOW THEIR SKETCHES TO THE CLASS AND TO DESCRIBE IN THEIR OWN WORDS, THE PHYSICAL SETTING.

3)

THE NEXT ACTIVITY IS TO GET STUDENTS TO ADD MORE DETAILS, USING THEIR OWN IMAGINATION, TO THE RATHER PROSAIC DESCRIPTION OF THE VIEW FROM YOUR FRIEND'S HOUSE. ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO BE FANCIFUL. THE DESCRIPTIONS CERTAINLY DO NOT HAVE TO CONFORM TO THE REALITY OF THE CHICHIBU AREA :

Pre-reading activity 3

Now, please try to imagine a fine day in October—sunny but cool. You can see very clearly in every direction. Pick a direction—east, north, south, west—what can you see from the second floor window of my friend's house on the high hill? Think about the way the land drops down to the foot of the hill, what is beyond on the flat land? Are there buildings? Open fields? What kind of buildings? Are the fields farmland or unused land? What is beyond the fields or buildings? Please think about a place you know or use your imagination and create a totally new place. Write a description of what you can see in the space provided below :

[SPACE FOR STUDENTS TO WRITE DESCRIPTIONS]

GIVE THE STUDENTS ENOUGH TIME TO WRITE OUT AT

LEAST FIVE OR SIX DESCRIPTIVE SENTENCES—MORE IF TIME IS NOT OF A PREMIUM. ASK FOR A COUPLE OF STUDENTS TO READ OUT THEIR DESCRIPTIONS—OR HAVE STUDENTS EXCHANGE DESCRIPTIONS AND ADD THEM TO THEIR OWN ORIGINAL DRAWINGS. IF YOU HAVE A KNACK FOR DRAWING YOU MIGHT TRY DRAWING A PICTURE OF THE SCENE ON THE BOARD, OR BETTER STILL GET ONE OF THE BETTER STUDENT-SKETCHERS TO TRY DRAWING ON THE BOARD.

4)

THIS NEXT ACTIVITY IS AN ATTEMPT TO ANCHOR THE DESCRIPTION AND THE DRAWINGS INTO A MORE UTILITARIAN MOLD. THIS IS DONE FOR THE PURPOSE OF CONTRASTING A NON-LITERARY FORMAT (A MAP) WITH THE STEVIE SMITH POEM. THE POEM IS A VERY 'BARE-BONES' PANORAMA YET IT CONVEYS GREAT SWEEPS OF LANDSCAPE AND A VERY IMMEDIATE PHYSICAL, ALMOST GIDDY, SOARING MOVEMENT, AS IF THIS WERE A CAMERA PANNING OVER A LANDSCAPE WHILE THE OPENING CREDITS OF A MOVIE WERE BEING SHOWN. THERE IS ALSO AN INEFFABLE EMOTIONAL CONNECTION, A SENSE PERHAPS, OF THE SPIRIT RISING FROM THE BODY. EACH READER WILL BRING TO THIS POEM A DIFFERENT SENSE OF WHAT EMOTIONS ARE INVOLVED. IN ANY CASE THE SPARSENESS OF THE POEM'S TEXT CONVEYS SO VERY MUCH. EVEN THE MOST SKILFUL

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DRAFTSMAN COULD NOT CONVEY IN A PICTURE OR MAP
WHAT IS CONVEYED BY THIS POEM.

Pre-reading activity 4

There are many ways to describe a place so that another person can 'see' the place you are talking about. Of course, one of the easiest ways to 'see' a place is to take a photograph or draw a picture of it. Another way is to make a map. There are many kinds of maps. Look at the following examples of photographs, pictures and maps to get an idea of how different points of view can be shown in different ways.

[PAGE WITH DIFFERENT MAP STYLES] (SEE ATTACHED SHEETS) [TEACHER SHOULD COLLECT HER/HIS OWN EXAMPLES]

TALK ABOUT THE DIFFERENT MAPS—WHAT PURPOSE DO THEY SERVE? WHO WOULD USE THEM? HOW MUCH DETAIL CAN BE SHOWN? CAN YOU SHOW EMOTIONS ON A MAP? DO WE KNOW HOW THE MAP-MAKER FELT ABOUT THE PLACE HE WAS MAKING A MAP OF? CAN A MAP EVER BE CAPABLE OF GIVING A SENSE OF MOVEMENT?

5)

AFTER TALKING ABOUT THE VARIOUS MAPS AND WHAT THEY REPRESENT HAVE STUDENTS DRAW A MAP FROM

THE NEAREST STATION TO THE HOUSE ON THE HILL. THIS IS THE MAP THAT YOUR FRIND Aya SENT YOU SO THAT YOU CAN COME AND VISIT HER IN HER NEW 'OLD' HOME. YOU MIGHT HAVE STUDENTS INCLUDE AN INSET ON THE MAP TO SHOW HOW TO GET FROM Ikebukero Station TO THE STATION NEAREST YOUR FRIEND'S HOUSE—THIS COULD BE AN IMAGINARY STATION :

Pre-reading activity 5

Think of yourself as Aya. Now try to draw a map so that your friend can come visit you. Draw the map so that anyone looking at it could walk from the nearest station to your (Aya's) house. Try to include as much detail as possible—at least the most important landmarks—so that your friend can get to the house on the hill without too much trouble.

6)

FINALLY WE GET TO THE ACTUAL POEM ITSELF! BUT NOT QUITE IN THE WAY IT IS SET OUT ABOVE. ONE OF THE INTERESTING FEATURES OF THIS PARTICULAR POEM IS THAT THE PHYSICAL MOVEMENT CAN BASICALLY GO BOTH WAYS—THAT IS, ONE CAN START WITH THE LAST LINE AND MOVE FROM THE ONE SEAGULL FRAMED BY THE SKYLIGHT TO THE MANY WAVES OF THE OCEAN—IT IS AS IF, AS FAR AS CONTEXT WERE CONCERNED, THIS WERE A

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KIND OF 'PALINDROMIC' POEM. THERE IS THE PROBLEM OF Referential 'the' IN LINES SIX AND SEVEN AND 'that' IN LINE NINE, BUT THIS IS ONLY A SMALL PROBLEM—YOUR STUDENTS ARE EXCEPTIONALLY WELL-VERSED IN GRAMMAR IF THIS POSES A PROBLEM! THE VARIOUS LINES OF THE POEM SHOULD BE CUT UP INTO STRIPS AND SCRAMBLED ON THE SURFACE OF A TABLE. PERHAPS FOUR GROUPS OF STUDENTS COULD BE CREATED AND THEN TOLD THAT THERE WERE TWO POSSIBLE WAYS TO ARRANGE THIS POEM :

Pre-reading activity 6

There are nine lines to this poem, which is titled NUMBERS. You have these nine lines typed on separate pieces of paper and it is your group's task to put these lines in the order you think makes good sense. What is interesting about this poem is that these lines can be arranged in two ways! Either way makes good sense. Someone in your group should write down the final order in which you all agreed to arrange the lines of the poem.

[SCRAMBLED LINES OF THE POEM FOR TEACHER OR STUDENTS TO CUT INTO STRIPS] (SHEET PROVIDED)

WHEN STUDENTS HAVE EXHAUSTED THEMSELVES IN TRYING TO ARRANGE THE LINES OF THE POEM, HAVE THE GROUPS CHANGE TABLES TO SEE HOW THE OTHER GROUPS

ARRANGED THEIR POEMS. YOU MIGHT ASK FOR A QUICK VOTE ON WHICH ARRANGEMENT SEEMS TO MAKE THE MOST SENSE.

LISTENING/READING ACTIVITIES

STEVE SMITH RECORDED A NUMBER OF HER POEMS AND THEY ARE AVAILABLE ON CASSETTES. (AT THIS WRITING IT WAS NOT VERIFIED WHETHER THIS PARTICULAR POEM—*NUMBERS*—WAS ONE OF THE RECORDED POEMS. PERHAPS THE BRITISH COUNCIL COULD BE OF HELP.) IN ANY CASE WHETHER ON CASSETTE OR READ BY THE INSTRUCTOR, STUDENTS SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO CLOSE THEIR EYES AND LISTEN TO THE POEM. WITH EYES CLOSED THEY MAY BE BETTER ABLE TO 'SEE'. THE ISSUE OF HOW TO DEAL WITH UNKNOWN LEXIS IS ALWAYS PROBLEMATIC IN SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS WHERE AUTHENTIC MATERIALS ARE BEING USED. LUCKILY IN THIS PARTICULAR POEM THE ONLY WORDS THAT MAY POSE A REAL PROBLEM ARE 'ploughed'[plowed], 'seagull', 'cliff' and 'skyligh'. THESE CAN EASILY BE DEALT WITH THROUGH PARAPHRASE AND REFERENCE TO THE TEXT—OR THROUGH MIME OR DRAWINGS. IT IS THIS WRITERS VIEW THAT A QUICK GLOSS USING THE JAPANESE TERMS ('ploughed fields=sukimashita tanbo') IS JUSTIFIED HERE BECAUSE OF THE PROFICIENCY LEVEL OF THE TARGET GROUP AND FOR REASONS OF TIME CONSTRAINTS. IF PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE PROB-

LEMATIC ITEMS ARE READILY AVAILABLE, SHOWING THEM WHILE READING THE POEM MAY BE THE BEST SOLUTION. IN ANY CASE THE PURPOSE OF THIS APPROACH TO LITERATURE IS NOT TO GET BOGGED DOWN ON THE LANGUAGE—BUT TO ACCESS THE IMAGINATION OF THE STUDENT-READER/ LISTENER/ INTERPRETER.

1)

PLAY THE CASSETTE/READ THE POEM—SLOWLY, BUT DRAMATICALLY. TELL STUDENTS TO TRY TO PHYSICALLY EXPERIENCE WHAT THE POEM IS DESCRIBING—MAYBE IT IS GIVING AWAY TOO MUCH, BUT PERHAPS YOU COULD TELL THE STUDENTS TO THINK OF THEMSELVES AS A BIRD AS THEY LISTEN TO THE POEM. READ IT PERHAPS THREE TIMES—IT IS ONLY NINE LINES.

Listening activity 1

Listen to the poem with your eyes closed. This is a very visual poem and closing your eyes may help you to concentrate. There may be some words you do not know—do not worry about this. This is first time for you hear to the poem so you are only trying to get a general impresson.

PLAY THE TAPE/READ THE POEM AGAIN AND HAVE THE STUDENTS IN THE SAME FOUR REASSEMBLED GROUPS RE-SCRAMBLE THE CUT UP LINES OF THE POEM AND LISTEN AGAIN—TWO OR THREE TIMES—TO THE POEM AND

ARRANGE THE LINES IN THE ORDER THEY HEAR THEM.

Listening activity 2

Remix the cut up lines of the poem so they are in scrambled disorder. Now listen to the poem again—if you need to, listen to it one or two more times, and arrange the lines in the order you hear them spoken. What do you think of this arrangement? Is it the same as the arrangement you had in Pre-reading activity 6? If no, where are the differences? Which arrangement do you like better—(if yours was different from the original poem?)

2)

SINCE THIS POEM IS SO ACCESSIBLE IT MIGHT BE INTERESTING TO GET STUDENTS TO GO A LITTLE DEEPER BELOW THE SURFACE OF THE POEM. IT IS DIFFICULT TO ACCOMPLISH THIS WITHOUT STEERING STUDENTS IN A PARTICULAR DIRECTION—THE VERY QUESTION THAT YOU ASK— QUESTIONS ABOUT VOICE—WHO IS SPEAKING AND WHERE ARE THEY SITUATED? IS THE SPEAKER OMNISCIENT? IS THIS MEANT TO BE JUST A PICTURE OR IS THERE ANOTHER REASON FOR THE POEM'S EXISTENCE? BECAUSE OF THE TARGETED PROFICIENCY LEVEL IT MIGHT NOT HURT TO DROP A FEW SUGGESTIONS. HERE ARE SOME THAT THIS WRITER HAS THOUGHT ABOUT—THE VOICE IS THE SPIRIT OF SOMEONE WHO IS DREAMING/ THE VOICE IS A SOUL LEAV-

ING ITS BODY AT THE MOMENT OF DEATH/ THE VOICE IS THE IMAGINATION OF A BED-RIDDEN OLD MAN OR WOMAN WHOSE ONLY CONTACT WITH NATURE IS THROUGH THEIR SKYLIGHT AND WHATEVER PASSES ACROSS IT—THESE ARE JUST A FEW IDIOSYNCRATIC SUGGESTIONS. PERHAPS IT IS BEST TO LEAVE THIS SECTION AS AN OPTIMAL ACTIVITY. THERE ARE A LOT OF QUESTIONS POSED IN THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITY—THEY DO NOT OF COURSE ALL HAVE TO BE ANSWERED—THEY ARE THERE AS PROMPTS FOR THE STUDENTS TO THINK ABOUT WHY A POET CHOOSES WORDS AND THE WAYS TO USE THOSE WORDS TO IMPLY MEANING.

Reading activity 1

Have somebody in your group read the poem out loud. While you are listening try to think who could be thinking about such a scene, where are they as they tell us about the scene, are they physically present, or is this someone's memory of a place? Why did Stevie Smith start her description from the waves and not from the inside of the skylighted room? Anything you can think of is your own way of looking at this poem and it is as true as anybody else's way of looking at this poem—even the teacher's. That is why poetry is so interesting.

When you read this poem do you feel any movement? For example, do you feel a sense of flying, as if you were the seagull? Or do you feel like a spirit floating over the land? It is hard to interpret who is speaking—but it is very easy to picture the scene. Ocean, cliffs, fields, house

skylight, room. Steve Smith seems to go from a large outside view to a small interior view. Do you think the numbers have any meaning? We move from 1051 to 231 to 400 to 3 to 1 to 4 and 4 to 1 and 1—maybe these numbers have a purpose. What purpose do you think they serve?

These are the type of things we think about when we read poetry. Maybe we cannot answer them convincingly—but it is fun to think about them.

Pick some of the questions above and see if your group can come up with any interesting ideas—remember—one aspect of poetry is that everyone reads it in a personal way, and understands it on a personal level.

FOLLOW-UP

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES THAT ARE POSSIBLE, BUT IT HAS BEEN THIS WRITER'S INTENTION THAT STUDENTS ATTEMPT TO WRITE THEIR OWN DESCRIPTIVE POEMS. ONE OF THE INTERESTING THINGS ABOUT THE STEVIE SMITH POEM IS THAT IT HAS A HAIKU-LIKE FEEL TO IT IN ITS SPARSENESS—OF COURSE WITHOUT ADHERING TO THE CONVENTIONS IN BOTH METER AND SEASONALITY WHICH CHARACTERIZES CLASSICAL HAIKU. HOWEVER, IT WAS THIS 'HAIKUESQUE' QUALITY THAT SEEMD TO MAKE THE SELECTION OF THIS POEM PARTICULARLY SALIENT FOR THE JAPANESE EFL SETTING.

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ONE SUGGESTION IS TO HAVE STUDENTS IMAGINE THAT THEY ARE SOMETHING VERY SMALL—PERHAPS A MOUSE—AND TO DESCRIBE A MOUSE'S PROGRESS THROUGH A KITCHEN TO SOME SOURCE OF FOOD—THE DISTORTED VIEW OF HUMAN REALITY SEEN THROUGH THE DIMENSION OF THE MOUSE'S REALITY.

ANOTHER SUGGESTION IS TO HAVE STUDENTS IMAGINE THEY ARE IN A HOSPITAL BED—THEY HAD A SEVERE TRAFFIC ACCIDENT AND CANNOT MOVE THEIR BODY—THEY CAN SEE A TELEVISION AND THEY CAN ALSO SEE THE STREET REFLECTED IN THE GLASS OF A WINDOW ON THE BUILDING ACROSS FROM THEIR OWN HOSPITAL BUILDING—THEY CANNOT SEE THE OUTSIDE WORLD DIRECTLY ONLY THROUGH THIS DISTORTED REFLECTION.

A FURTHER SUGGESTION IS FOR THE STUDENTS TO DESCRIBE SOME FAVORITE ROOM OR BUILDING—TAKE THE READER ON A WALKING TOUR, BUT NOT USING THE EYES—USING THE SENSE OF SMELL OR THE SENSE OF TOUCH.

IN ALL OF THE ABOVE SUGGESTIONS STUDENTS SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO WRITE LINES THAT GIVE THE BAREST MINIMUM OF INFORMATION—JUST ENOUGH TO GIVE A FEELING FOR THE SETTING.

FOR THE LESS PROFICIENT STUDENT A PROSE DESCRIPTION ACCOMPANIED BY PICTURES CUT FROM VARIOUS SOURCES SUCH AS NEWSPAPER OR MAGAZINES—GOING FROM EITHER LARGE TO SMALL (TOP DOWN) OR SMALL TO LARGE (BOTTOM UP)—BUT EVEN HERE AT THIS LEVEL, STUDENTS SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO USE SHARP, SHORT CLEAR, ‘BARE-BONES’ SENTENCES — ALMOST TELEGRAPHIC IN STYLE. IF GOOD ENOUGH PERHAPS STUDENTS COULD BE ENCOURAGED TO DRAW THEIR OWN PICTURES.

Writing Activity

Your teacher is going to make some suggestions to you about ideas for writing a poem that is similar in style to Stevie Smith’s *Numbers*. This poem is very much like Japanese Haiku, which has had a big influence on poetry in the West. If you decide to write a poem try to make your lines short, sharp and clear—almost in a mem-ostyle—you want to give a descriptive picture, but you do not want to give so much detail that the reader cannot use her or his imagination to the fullest. Do not be afraid to experiment—poetry can be a lot of fun to write. Do not forget —your idea, your view of the world is as true and as equal to any other human being’s view of the world. Good luck—and do not forget—Stevie Smith loved to play with words and loved to make jokes—try to write with this spirit of playfulness, too.

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CONCLUSION

This is one suggested way to approach using literature in the EFL classroom. As one can imagine, such an approach is quite time consuming. It is suggested that such an approach be integrated into the typical English Conversation classroom periodically. The individual teacher can create her/his own materials or s/he can comb the texts that are listed as resource texts in the bibliography that follows. It is important that the teacher selects texts that are of importance to her/ him personally. In this way the teacher will be involved on an emotional level that is often lacking when 'LITERATURE' texts from the received canon are chosen. The purpose of the approach outlined above is to use literature as a door into the imagination, not as a means of teaching LITERATURE.

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SELECTED LIST OF RESOURCE TEXTS FOR
THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

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