

Bridging Tasks over Troubled Waters

By A. Teacher

To my surprise, most of my teaching hours this year involve classes that will do the New Literature program. It's not so new anymore, is it? Quite a number of years have passed since the first pilots of the program disappeared somewhere in the Pacific. I had a year of Sabbatical, a couple years teaching 4 points and junior high, while others around me were teaching the curse and cursing. ... er ... teaching the course and cursing. I was also getting paid the old way, no O, F**CK Hadash or O*** ! Letmuta for me. I figured I could beat the system 'til I reached retirement age.

Well, surprise surprise: this year it all hit me; 'partani' hours' 'shehayya' hours, undecipherable salary slips, retina scan clocks, the works. Including, the necessity of following a rigid course of literary items plus collateral HOTS, all set by school functionaries. The most efficient way to go, I was advised, was to take several of the ready-made unit plans and just press the button. Leave creativity to the Creator.

I could swallow this until we came to something called the bridging task. In theory, it's a great idea: Present our students with background facts about the authors, their families, social background, dramatic events in their lives. After all, what do our students know about Victorian England, the Renaissance, the Great Depression, or even last August? Ask them, for example, when were the slaves freed in America, and you're likely to get answers from 200 years ago to 20 years ago to next year to when Obama freed them.

Some of the pieces we teach don't even make sense unless you wrap them up in social and historical contexts: Young readers who think the world was always like this would be in a quandary: Why doesn't George, of "Summer's Reading" for example, read his 100 books off Kindle? Why didn't Kate in "All my Sons" make Larry wear those follow me Nikes?—

she'da known the instant he was aced.(sorry if I spoiled the ending for you.) Why couldn't Ozymandias keep a backup copy, and so on.

So, yeah, I thought. Let's teach our students some useful general knowledge. Good in theory, abominable in practice: This is what I found, in one of the leading textbooks (I made small, insignificant changes from the original). Here are the actual 'bridging tasks:'

Mr Know All: "Children laughed at (Maugham)because of his French accent and because he was short. He was so unhappy that he started to stammer. We might say he was a victim of prejudice and discrimination."

Questions: How does this affect the way Maugham presents prejudice in Mr Know All. Does Maugham have prejudices?"

Is this for real? Since when is schoolyard bullying prejudice? What does it have to do with the effete snobbery of the post-Edwardian narrator of the story? If we were teaching a story about Napoleon, I might see the connection, but as it is, any honest attempt to answer these questions produces an incredibly lame result.

Here's another one: **Count that Day Lost...George Elliot's works often criticize the behavior of the upper classes. She was concerned with the responsibility that people should take in their daily lives.**

How does the poem reflect the issues she wrote about? Does the fact that the poem was written by a woman add or change your understanding of the poem?

Imagine I'm a 4 pointer and I studied the poem, but heck if I know the answer to this one. "She was concerned with the responsibility of people in their daily lives so she wrote a poem that people should take responsibility daily?? If the poem had been written by a man then we would discuss the issues HE wrote about?? The upper classes were not good because they did not do a good deed every day?"

I'm a native speaker, I have a BA in Literature, not from Bimbo U, but from a real university and I wrote a real thesis. But I can't write an answer to these questions. Any answer sounds lame in all four paws. However, I am a firm believer in the adage, if you can't beat them, join them. So, let me offer some Bridging- Text- to Context- style tasks. You may find them useful someday:

All My Sons:

Author Miller was, at one point in time, married to Marilyn Monroe, arguably the most beautiful woman in the world at that time. Some say she committed suicide. (She starred in the movie Some Like it HOTS).

Question: How is Monroe's death reflected in the death of Larry and also of Joe? Is the character of Sue haunted by her feelings of inadequacy over her appearance?

The Road Not Taken: At the age of 27, Robert Frost, while hiking along the 1200 mile Appalachian Trail, came upon a fork in the road and deliberated what to do for several weeks. Few other hikers passed that way, and the poet was presumed missing. (36- Day-Lost Frost, they called him.)

Question: Could there be any connection between this traumatic event in the poet's life and the situation of the poem? Why does Kate insist that her son Robert is "presumed missing."?

Hamlet

In Shakespeare's time, the majority of Englishmen spoke English. As women were allowed on the stage, young men had to take women's names and clothing.

Question: Why do you think that the characters of Hamlet speak English, although they are supposed to be Danish? What would happen if George

Elliot, in men's attire, ran into Ophelia, a boy dressed in women's clothing). When Anne looked into Larry's closet, who did she find there who was trying to come out?

The Book of Genesis:

When the Almighty was young, He passed the tests for the "Gifted Gods" program and attended the program, where he was considered "extremely creative and original."

Question: Do you think that there is anything in the Lord's background, as we see from the text, that could have encouraged him to create the Heavens and the Earth? Could it be possible that God is female, and was forced to take a masculine name and male clothing so that HIS/HER art would be taken seriously in those primitive times?

Imagine: John Lennon suffered from a troubled childhood after his parents' divorce. His father was a clergyman, but his mother professed no religion, and much of the time they had no possessions, too.

Question: Which themes in the song "Imagine" may have had their origin in the poet's life? Why is Kate convinced that Paul will return someday, considering that John is the one who was killed? And shouldn't it be 'no religion, either?'

Tune in next week, as we do "On Line Blood Tests for Students with Bleeding Disabilities."

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