

This opened the way for some lessons on the writing of poetry and some very creditable first efforts spontaneously appeared.

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INTEREST AND ENTHUSIASM IN TEACHING POETRY IN HIGH SCHOOL

IT HAS often been asked how interest and enthusiasm in teaching poetry in high school classes can be maintained, especially when boys think that poetry is effeminate, a study for girls, forced upon them. Consequently they declare their hate for anything that is poetry. Many girls have a different opinion and yet it is one that is unfavorable. Poetry to them is ethereal, unearthly, intangible.

Although no formal method can be followed, a few suggestions may be of help to the instructor. One of the chief reasons for the dislike of the study of poetry is a lack of understanding of the occasion of the poem and the special circumstances under which a poem was composed, and sometimes of the events of a poet's life that aided in the composition of a poem. Just how detailed this study should be, as well as the best way of introducing it, is left to the discretion of the instructor. It might be a lesson assigned for outside reading and a discussion in class before a poem is read. So much of the material should be taken up as will clarify an otherwise obscure poem.

Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* has always been considered an obscure poem by most students, but when one understands the circumstances under which it was written, it becomes more clear. The story that Coleridge tells is well known: In the summer of 1797 Coleridge had retired to a lonely farmhouse between Porlock and Linton. He was slightly indisposed and an anodyne was prescribed. He fell asleep and for three hours he was in a profound sleep, at least

of the external senses, during which time he had composed less than from two to three hundred lines. On awaking, he had a clear recollection of the whole and wrote it down just as we have it. He was interrupted by a man on business from Porlock, and when he came back to his room, he had forgotten all the rest.

Byron's *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* is more fully appreciated when one knows that Lord Byron wrote this poem as a direct attack upon the editor of the *Edinburgh Review* for the severe criticism of his *Hours of Idleness*, his first book of poems, all of which were written before he was nineteen years of age. Byron thought Jeffry had written the article. As was Byron's method, he attacked not only Jeffry, but every well-known literary man of his time. The criticism from the *Edinburgh Review* might be read to the class.

Of all the poets studied in the high school Browning will be found to be most obscure. With his encyclopedic knowledge of all arts of the Renaissance and his vast store of material concerning remote and often eccentric people, it is not a wonder that students are often bewildered when confronted with one of Browning's poems. *Andrea del Sarto* offers an interesting study when the proper approach is made. John Kenyon, a friend of the Brownings, asked Browning to buy him a copy of *Andrea del Sarto*, a painting by the artist of himself and wife. Since Browning could not get a copy, he wrote the poem which contains all the things the painting had meant to him, and sent it on to Kenyon. A copy of the portrait might be shown to the class. Though this fact alone does not clear up all the difficulties ordinarily encountered in a poem of Browning—especially in a monologue where the speakers are not introduced, where words and transitions are omitted, parentheses put in, and a rapid jumping style is used—it does add a certain interest that would otherwise be lost if these facts remained unknown.

Not all poems require the detailed study

that might be given to such poems that are mentioned. In some cases a few preliminary statements made by the instructor is all that is needed. It may be well to remember that what may seem to be perfectly clear to an instructor, may be the most obscure to a student. Some of us recall how obscure certain passages or even entire poems were that were read in our high school class. How easily this difficulty could have been removed!

There are other items of importance that enter into the teaching of poetry after the proper approach has been made. The rhythm of the poem should be dwelt upon, and its worth in poetry pointed out. The most important metrical and stanzaic forms should be taught. Figures of speech should be pointed out, especially those which beautify expressions. The central theme or emotion should be brought out. Difficulties in phrasing, inversion, and diction should be cleared up. Some poems are easily separated into topical divisions, which help to clarify poems. Shelley's *To a Skylark* naturally falls into four main divisions: the direct description of the lark's song; the description of the lark by comparisons—similes; the appeal to know the source of the lark's happiness; the explanation of the superiority of the skylark's song to the poet's. Poems like this may be compared with other poems of the same topic by different authors. As a last suggestion for the appreciation of poetry we mention frequent memory assignments.

We realize that these few cursory, unmethodical remarks on teaching of poetry to high school students are not an end in themselves. We hope they are not too desultory, but that they suggest a means for further study.

After all is said and done, an instructor's enthusiasm in her subject is of paramount importance. It is only then that she can hope to awaken an enthusiasm in her students.

MARIE LOUISE BOJE

NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL AWARDS

Four thousand dollars will be distributed in prizes to students this spring through the series of awards offered by the American Education Press, Inc., of Columbus, Ohio, from whom rules of the contest may be obtained. All contributions must be received by March 15, 1930.

Particularly, will English teachers find stimulus and incentive in this list of awards:

Short Story (Contest No. 1)—For the best short stories written by students the first prize is \$50; second prize, \$25; third prize, \$10; and 48 honorable mention prizes, \$5 each. Not more than 2,500 words each.

Essay (Contest No. 2)—For the best essays the first prize is \$50; second prize, \$25; third prize, \$10; 48 honorable mention prizes, \$5 each, for the best essay from each state. Not more than 1,000 words.

Autobiography (Contest No. 3)—For the best essay on the subject "An Interesting Chapter from My Life," the prizes are the same as for the Essay (Contest No. 2).

Poetry (Contest No. 4)—Three major awards are \$50, \$25, and \$10; 48 honorable mention prizes, \$5 each, for the best selection of verse from each state. Manuscripts submitted for this contest limited to 80 lines.

Book Review (Contest No. 5)—Prizes: First, \$15; second, \$10; third, \$5; and 48 honorable mention prizes, \$1. Book reviewed must not be over two years old.

Editorial (Contest No. 6)—For the best editorial on a current problem, the major prizes are \$15, \$10, and \$5. In addition, 75 minor prizes will be awarded.

Magazine Review (Contest No. 7)—For the best review of any article appearing in the standard magazines, the three major prizes are \$15, \$10, and \$5. Seventy-five minor prizes will also be awarded.

One-Act Play (Contest No. 8)—The three major prizes are: First prize, \$50; second prize, \$25; third prize, \$10; 20 honorable mention prizes, \$5 each.

Current Science (Contest No. 9)—For the best article on any science topic—not more than 1,000 words—the prizes are the same as for Contest No. 3.

Sports Story (Contest No. 10)—For the best description of an athletic contest, or the best short story built around sports, the prizes are the same as the Short Story Contest, No. 1. Not more than 1,500 words.

Magazine World Art (Contest No. 11)—For the best magazine cover design for *The Magazine World*, prizes ranging from \$50 to \$5 will be given. The work may be done in crayon, water colors, or oil.