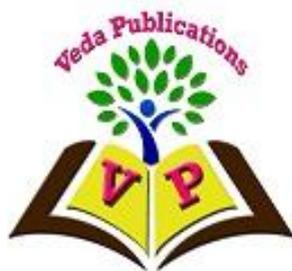


**CREATIVITY AND CRITICAL LITERACY**

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Nungambakkam, Chennai, India [PSBBSSS-NGM]***ABSTRACT**

Creativity plays a major role in the fostering of critical literacy among students the world over. "Critical literacy" is defined as the ability to actively read text in a manner that promotes a deeper understanding of socially constructed concepts such as power, inequality and injustice in human relationships.

Poetry is a powerful genre in the field of literature that has always lent itself to the exploration of various situations, for centuries. Themes like war and peace have been of prime importance, even before the advent of machines.

The CBSE literature texts prescribed for the students of junior college – stds. XI and XII deal with these topics in right earnest, so that young students may become 'thoughtful and active citizens and the agents of change' as per the aim of critical literacy. When introduced and interspersed with creative activities, the teacher can ensure that the tender saplings under her/his care are thoughtfully nurtured, to spread shade and goodness as they grow into strong trees, rendering yeoman service to society.

*A Doctor's Journal Entry* [Std.XI] by Vikram Seth and *Survivors* [Std.XII] by Siegfried Sassoon are two classic examples of war-related poetry. Activities such as a 'shadow play module' and 'roleplay' done by students lead to a critical understanding and realisation of war-related issues, which also lead to an improvement of their language – writing (journal entry and poetry writing) and speaking (discussion).

*Modern Machinery* [Std.XI] by Rudyard Kipling is explored, using activities like dramatics and debate. The popular event, 'Block and Tackle' is used to explore the threat posed by 'artificial intelligence' as an extrapolation. Thus, students are made to think, discuss and question various important situations and issues in the world today, using creative methods and innovative practices based on the text, thereby ensuring the holistic development of the students, while they assimilate the nuances of the English language and improve their reading, writing and speaking skills as well.



## INTRODUCTION

Critical literacy is certainly the need of the hour and the fact that “Fake News” has been deemed the ‘word of the year 2017’ by Collins only validates its importance and urgency.<sup>[1]</sup> Never before has the world become so submerged in a deluge of information as in the 21st century – whether factual, ‘alleged’ or fabricated. Therein lies the need for us to sift or filter the information thrust upon us – whether by the all-knowing and all-pervasive media or by our own textbooks in educational institutions.

*Critical literacy* is defined as “The ability to actively read text in a manner that promotes a deeper understanding of socially constructed concepts such as power, inequality and injustice in human relationships.”<sup>[2]</sup> It is also defined as “the ability to take apart various texts in media or writing, to find any possible discrimination that the author might have embedded in his or her own presentation of the world.”<sup>[3]</sup>

Originating from Marxist pedagogy that advocates the adoption of critical perspectives towards texts, critical literacy encourages readers to actively analyse texts and offer strategies for uncovering underlying messages. There are several different perspectives of Critical literacy – that of Brazilian Educator and theorist Paulo Freire, Ira Shore, Peter Maclean, etc. All of these approaches advocate that a critical and questioning approach must be adopted while disseminating facts.

## THE STUDY

### THE ROLE OF CREATIVITY

Creativity plays a major role in the fostering of critical literacy the world over. Teachers can use various techniques to encourage the development of critical literacy. Students can be guided to read literature analytically. After they read the text, they can extrapolate, express their own ideas and opinions, even challenging the text. They can air their views, write essays or poems of their own, expressing their own ideas.

Poetry is a powerful genre in the field of literature, that has always lent itself to the exploring of various topics, for centuries. Themes like ‘war’ and ‘peace’ have always been of prime importance, even before the concept of ‘social justice’ or ‘human rights’.

The CBSE Literature textbooks of the students of junior college [classes XI and XII] deal with these topics in right earnest.

- 1) *A Doctor’s Journal Entry* by Vikram Seth, taught in Std.XI, and *Survivors* by Siegfried Sassoon [Std.XII] are two classic examples of war-related poetry. Creative activities like the ‘shadow play module’ done by students and ‘roleplay’ – apart from discussions – lead to a critical analysis of war and its condemnation as students internalise the consequences of war – the horrors caused by nuclear bombs (Hiroshima and Nagasaki 1945) and war in general.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Shadow play module: Std.XI*

A group of students enact the scene of the bombing and its after-effects in a dark room, behind a white curtain, using special lighting and sounds, while the poem is read aloud. A recording of this is played in class, using the digiboard.

### *Role play: Std.XII*

The students are asked to stand up and take a few steps forward enacting the way the soldiers went out to battle “grim and glad” and then return to their seats “broken and mad” to encourage them to feel the difference.

## RESULTS

These activities drive home the point about the grim reality of war and students discuss present day crises and the unrest in many parts of the world, in countries like Syria, the threat of terrorism etc. They are sensitised about the gory details of nuclear bomb explosions and they raise questions like “Why war?”, “Why is war an option to resolve issues?”, “Who determines the value of one human life over others?”, “How can we achieve longlasting peace?”, etc. Thus students are encouraged to discuss the modern day scenario, making them don their thinking caps so that they become responsible individuals in whose hands the future lies. Through such poems and activities, the present day students are moulded into responsible future citizens and leaders. At the same time, they also assimilate the language used by the poets, the expressions and poetic devices to bring out the trauma. Students also



attempt writing poetry of their own on current critical situations which they feel disturbed about.

- 2) The poem *Modern Machinery* by Rudyard Kipling [Std.XI] is explored using activities like dramatics and debate. The popular competition (at student cultural events) 'Block and Tackle' is also used to explore the rising threat posed by artificial intelligence as an extrapolation.

### METHODOLOGY

*Dramatics:* The students were asked to dramatise the poem in groups while the poem was read aloud.

*Debate:* A class debate was conducted on the motion 'Machines will rule the world in future'

*Block and Tackle:* The game was played by students based on the topic 'Artificial Intelligence', when student volunteers were asked to bring out the merits and demerits of artificial intelligence, standing in front of the class, in a quick and convincing manner. This activity served as an extrapolation of the text.

### RESULTS

The students realize the power and role of machines in our lives. The debate makes them ponder over the modern universal question about the threat posed by machines, even though they are man-made. The students enjoy the activities but become a thinking and questioning community, while they imbibe the language and writing skill of the poet.

### CONCLUSION

Thus the students are given ample opportunities to explore the text in a creative and critical manner. The activities are followed by class discussions in which students review and analyse the work of the poet. They are encouraged to write their own poetry/article to bring out contemporary incidents of social concern.

The teacher serves as a medium towards social progress by empowering the tender saplings under his/her care to be thinking individuals. The students assimilate the nuances of the English language and improve their reading, writing and speaking skills as well.

When creativity is used as a tool to foster critical literacy, the aim is realized – of encouraging young

students to become thoughtful and active citizens and agents of social change themselves.

*"You can't use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have."*

- Maya Angelou, American poet and social rights activist.

Hence, an eclectic mix of creativity and critical literacy is the way forward and the onus of this responsibility falls on the teachers' shoulders.

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