



Study on Teaching Strategies of Novels in Secondary School

—Taking Chinese Textbooks of People's Education Press as an Example

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Abstract

As one of the four common literary genres, the novel has been receiving much attention and favour for a long time, and has its unique shining point, including mythology, chivalry, kung fu, science fiction, mystery, love, etc. Contents of the Chinese textbooks of People's Education Press are diverse. There are more than 20 novels selected in secondary school Chinese textbooks for teachers and students to learn. Though it is small in proportion, it is worth studying. This paper explores the teaching strategies of the novels in the Chinese textbooks of People's Education Press in secondary school, and tries to find out the ways in which teachers improve students' learning interest in classroom teaching, so as to put the novel teaching into practice effectively.

Subject Areas

Education

Keywords

People's Education Press, Chinese in Secondary School, Novels, Classroom Teaching

1. Introduction

“Maxim Gorky (1868-1936) once said that fiction is the life of the times and the history of emotions” [1]. In China, the word “xiaoshuo” first appeared in “*Zhuangzi, External Things*”, “It is far, far away from the way of understanding to embellish the xiaoshuo in order to gain a high reputation”. Here in *Zhuangzi*, the word “xiaoshuo” mainly refers to some trivial remarks and has no connection to the

meaning of novel at present. “With the development of society, the concept of novel has also changed in an invisible way. The Song Dynasty developed it into two different systems, the classical Chinese novels and vernacular novels. After a long period of development in Wei, Jin and the Southern and Northern Dynasties, along with Sui and Tang Dynasties, the Biji Xiaoshuo (notebook novels) and legendary novels were formed” [2]. All the stories come from folk life, and show different artistic charms of different times. According to the length of novels, they can be divided into four types: mini-novels, short stories, novellas and full-length novels. Different types of novels have different teaching emphases, and most of them are short stories in the Chinese textbooks of PEP. This paper aims to explore the teaching strategies of short stories in Chinese textbooks.

The novel, centered on the portrayal of the characters, is the narrative literature that reflects the real life of the society through complete plot, description of the environment, profound theme and elaborate perspectives, which is the most popular among students. “There are three essential elements in novels, vivid character image, complete story plot and typical and specific environment description” [3]. In classroom teaching, teachers should give consideration to these three aspects, which supplement each other. However, different types of novels have different emphases, so we should grasp the emphases in teaching and choose the appropriate breakthrough point.

The new Chinese curriculum standard requires students’ reading and appreciation ability of literary works, which means students should consider their own emotions in understanding the connotation of novels, so as to obtain life enlightenment. Therefore, teachers should give priority to students when teaching novels, give play to the educational function of Chinese teaching materials, improve students’ overall Chinese literacy, and improve the timeliness of novel teaching. Teachers can try the following ways:

2. To Connect with the Whole Work and Enrich the Teaching Content

Different strokes for different folks. Different readers may have different interpretations of novels. Novels that selected in the textbooks are not only of great reading importance, but also of unique teaching value. Due to the time-limitation in Chinese classroom teaching, the editor cannot make each work the entire content into the teaching material, but for the most readable and the most significant. In class teaching, it isn’t enough for teachers to simply explain the excerpts. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to contact the whole work for teaching, enrich the classroom teaching content, encourage students to read the original text, expand their own learning knowledge, and better understand the profound meaning of the novel.

For example, in the first volume of the ninth grade Chinese textbook of PEP, the teaching strategy of the passage *A Lonely Journey*, an excerpt from *The Straw House* by Chinese writer Cao Wenxuan, is discussed. Although the origi-

nal text is a long novel, the excerpt *A Lonely Journey* is concise in narrating, and has a complete story plot and distinct characters. Thus, it can be used as a short story to guide students to learn. When teaching this novel, if the teacher does not supplement the original text, it is difficult to understand the integrity of the characteristics of the protagonist by simply analyzing the character image and story plot of the excerpt. *A Lonely Journey* mainly tells the story of Du Xiaokang, who forced to go to the reed marshes with his father to raise ducks after the bankruptcy of his family. From this plot, we can see that Du Xiaokang suffered through the hardships of raising ducks, and finally became a brave and strong boy. He grew up in an instant. It also reveals the theme of the novel. However, in the original text of *The Straw House*, Du Xiaokang has many facets of characteristics. Before raising ducks, Du Xiaokang was a pampered and proud boy due to his rich family. Later, he experienced family misfortune, environmental changes, loneliness, hunger and coldness, illness, etc., and his personality gradually changed and became diverse. Therefore, it is far from enough for teachers to analyze the plot and image of the excerpt when teaching. They should contact the whole text, enrich the classroom teaching content, and guide students to interpret the novel from various perspectives.

It is the same with *Xiangling Learning Poems*, and *Wu Yong by a Ruse Captures the Birthday Gifts*. With these cases, it is easy to conclude that the interpretation of character images in current secondary school teaching is one-sided. Chinese teachers need to base on the excerpt, grasp the complete plot from the original text, analyze characters from various aspects, restore a real character image for students, and enrich the teaching content, so as to further improve the quality of classroom teaching.

3. To Analyze the Title of the Novel and Grasp the Theme of the Article

“It is said that the title is a lantern that lights up the reader’s eyes” [4]. Indeed, the title contains key information. It is the same in our daily life. For example, when the name of a store reads “Noddles”, we are certain that it is a restaurant selling noodles, even though what kind of noodles it provides is unsure. The key information lies inside, as well as the title of a novel. The title of a novel has multiple functions. In classroom teaching of a novel, teachers should guide students to learn to start from the title, understand the meaning of the title, and grasp the theme of the article.

First of all, the novel title is the explanation and interpretation of the image of the main character. For example, *Kong Yiji* by Luxun, one of the novels at ninth-grade in Chinese textbook of PEP, is directly named after the protagonist of the story. A clear-cut title points out the main character of the novel, which is also a way to attract readers.

In addition, the title is the summary of the main events of the novel and highlight of the main plot and theme. For example, the title of *Fan Jin Zhongju*

shows that the story is around the event of Fan Jin's passing exam. Through hyperbole, he is depicted as the man who is too happy to turn crazy for the imperial examination.

Thirdly, it serves as a clue throughout the whole text, such as *The Necklace* by Maupassant at the ninth grade of the PEP edition. This article mainly adopts the technique of writing people by things, and takes the necklace as the main line of the article, in which the behavior, language and psychological activities of the characters in the article are firmly tied, so that the readers can understand the characters thoroughly through the necklace.

Last but not least, it is to highlight the image of the characters, such as Chekhov's novel *Chameleon*. It adopts the rhetorical device of symbolism and metaphor, which vividly shows the characteristics of the hero who is a hypocrite.

Obviously, there are more functions of the title of a novel. To better guide students to learn the novel title, teachers should learn to start from the analysis of the title and fully understand the main idea of the story.

4. To Create Teaching Environment and Improve Learning Interest

Interest is the best teacher. Fiction is different from prose, poetry and other forms of genres. In the teaching process, teachers can create the corresponding teaching situation for students, attracts student's attention, and enhance their study interest. "For instance, the "situational approach", based on the situations depicted, is an excellent way to create vivid pictures, supplemented with vivid literary language, and reproduce the scene described in the text with the help of the artistic appeal of music" [5]. In this way, students would feel as if they are at the scene of the text. The teaching quality of novels in Chinese textbooks can be improved by analyzing text in depth, stimulating students to actively participate in classroom learning and making full use of situational approach.

Taking Chekhov's *The Man in a Case* in high school Chinese textbook as an example. The original text is as follows:

"He... always wearing galoshes and a warm wadded coat, and carrying an umbrella even in the very finest weather." He put his belongings which he took with him to one "case" and another; he even hid his face "in his turned up collar"; he "wore dark spectacles and flannel vests, stuffed up his ears with cotton-wool". The actions and appearance described are illustrations for his characteristics of isolation. He was also timid and fearful, "when he went to bed he covered his head over", "he felt frightened under the bed-clothes", everything made him nervous and he kept saying "I hope nothing will come out of it". There are descriptions of actions, psychology and language, showing his characteristics of timidity, cowardliness, and suspicion.

When a teacher explains the above contents, he can combine videos with pictures and collect relevant teaching resources, so that the image of "Byelikov" can be seen and students will perceive his image more intuitively. What's more,

teachers can carry out role-playing activities with students, so that students can participate in the creation of situations and experience the inner world of characters in the process of role-playing. Secondary school students have certain ability to comprehend. Therefore, to better understand the image of Byelikov, teachers can ask students to play roles according to the description of the actions, appearances, psychology and other contents of the novel to comprehensively understand the theme of the novel. In this way, the diversity of classroom teaching will be increased and the quality of teaching can be improved.

5. To Optimize the Teaching Content Based on the Reality of Life

“Art is from life. All art works are reflections of the society at a certain period of time, and also connected with the society we are now living in” [6]. It is true of novels. In classroom teaching, students should be closely connected with the status of their lives, and teachers should optimize the teaching content, deeply grasp the main idea of the novel, and improve the comprehension ability of students.

For example, in the novel *My Uncle Jules*, the characteristics of the selfish, cold and vainglorious petty bourgeoisie were vividly revealed through the changes in the attitude of the Philip family towards Jules. “When Mr. Philip recognized Jules, the sailor, who was selling oysters, he suddenly became uneasy and tried to avoid his eye contact, lest he should recognize him” [7]. Teachers should lead students to connect the story with their own life experiences to find out if there are people of the Philips around them. If the answer is yes, what had they done, what did they think, and were they as selfish as the Philips?

This method, teaching relates lives in reality, can be applied to similar novels in teaching. In this way, it is easy to guide students to understand the plot of the novel, grasp the portray of characters, optimize the teaching content, and improve the quality of classroom teaching. It can also resonate with readers in their lives.

6. Conclusions

Novel teaching is a key part in secondary school. Based on the novel itself, explanation of novel title, and the actual life of students, teachers can adopt the above-mentioned methods, choose appropriate ways to stimulate students' learning incentives, encourage students to participate in the learning and enable them to enjoy the pleasure of reading novels, so as to improve the timeliness and quality of classroom teaching.

Although this paper tries to propose teaching strategies of novels in Chinese textbooks of secondary school from various aspects, it also has some shortcomings due to the limited teaching experience of the author. For example, more examples of classroom teaching of novels in secondary school Chinese textbooks of the PEP should be analyzed, and deeper understanding and thinking about

the current situation of teaching and learning should be added. In the future study, the author will continue to do research on this topic, and provide more feasible suggestions on novels teaching in secondary school Chinese textbooks, so as to improve the teaching effect.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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