

## UNIT-3 TEACHING OF ENGLISH POETRY

### Learning Objectives

Student will be able to:

- Recall the meaning of the poetry
- Understand the objectives of teaching poetry
- Explain the techniques involved in the teaching of poetry
- Discuss the procedure involved in the teaching of poetry

The teaching of English poetry in almost all our secondary schools does not perceptibly differ from the teaching of English Prose. Poetry is regarded as a more difficult kind of prose with special difficulties of language, grammatical construction and involved thought. The numbers of poetry, lessons are few. There are two broad aims of teaching prose and poetry : (a) literary aim and (b) subject matter aim, For achieving these two aims, the teaching of prose and poetry should be intensive (for achieving literary aim) as well as extensive (for achieving subject matter aim). Intensive study is mainly related to explanations, detailed information, appreciation and all those aspects that are considered essential for the development of aesthetic sense. Extensive study means gaining of knowledge. Hence the role of poetry-teaching in schools should not be made a controversial issue but its teaching is also essential for increasing students, comprehension.

### Definition of Poetry

According to **Hudson**, “Poetry is made out of life, belongs to life and exist for life.”

**Milton** says, “Poetry is simple, sensuous and passionate.”

**Matthew Arnold** writes: “Poetry is the criticism of life.”

**Coleridge** defines poetry as, “The best words in their best order.”

### Characteristics of Poetry

The following characteristics have been indicated by above definitions of poetry :

1. Poetry is the best words in their best rhythmical order.
2. It is musical and metrical form of language.
3. Poetry is a thing of beauty of form, beauty and ideas, thoughts, and emotions.
4. Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings and emotions.
5. It is rhythmical creation of thoughts in best words.
6. Poetry is best form of composition for expressing feelings, thoughts and emotions.
7. Poetry is best form of composition for expressing feelings, thoughts and emotions.
8. Poetry is a simple, sensuous and passionate expression.

9. Poetry is the criticism and appreciation of life.
10. Poetry is the best form of English literature,
11. It is source of enjoyment and encouragement.
12. Poetry educates our feelings and emotions.
13. It is a best means to develop the students aesthetic sense and provide pleasure.

14. Poetry is a source for creating love for English literature among students.

15. Poetry is the soul of English literature.

16. In the one case the poet functions as a detached observer, describing what he has seen or heard. (Objective); in the other case he brings to bear, his own reflections upon what he has seen or heard (subjective).

### **Advantages of Teaching Poetry**

The arguments in favour of teaching poetry in our schools are as under:

(1) Poetry has tremendous Appeal: Poetry has tremendous appeal for children and it is the best way of exciting their love of the language. It is not fully realized how near the child is to the poet. Poetry has a special appeal for the aesthetic and intuitive sides of the child's personality.

(2) Poetry educates our Emotions: Poetry educates our emotions and increased our power of imagination. We can compare prose with walking, moving from one place to another on the surface of the earth, getting the world's daily work done' poetry may be compared then to dancing, rising above the surface of the earth, perceiving its relations, getting a fuller view of its reality

It has cathartic value because it helps in expression and training of emotions. According to Billows, "There seems to be a special value in poetry in a foreign language in opening up the fantasy and giving release to inhibit and excessively introverted types."

(3) Poetry is Memorable: Poetry is more memorable than prose because of its arrangement of rhyme and rhythm. It has been rightly defined as memorable speech.

(4) Rhythm of Poetry Helps to Acquire Speech: The rhythm of poetry helps the learner to acquire natural speech rhythms. This is specially so at the early stage when simple rhymes are used for the practice of rhythm and pronunciation.

(5) Poetry imparts pleasure to the students: Poetry imparts pleasure to the students. It makes glad the heart of man. It lays the foundation for the appreciation of the beauty of language, for poetry is beauty-beauty of form, beauty of thought, mood or feelings.

(6) Poetry as Media of Variety: Poetry introduces variety in the English course and is a good antidote against boredom.

One of the advantages of reciting poetry with proper stress and rhythm is to impart training in speech and pronunciation to the pupils. The reading of poetry helps us to acquire the natural rhythm of English speech.

### **General Objectives of Teaching Poetry**

Menon and Patel have said, "The aim of teaching poetry is not so much to improve the child's knowledge of English as to add to his joy and increase his power of appreciation of beauty."

Dev Singh writes : In teaching poetry, the aim is mainly to enjoy the music, rhythm and rhyme of the verse, the beauty and force of the phraseology, the which craft of the figures so speech and the emotions of the poet. Learning of words and phrases in incidental only"

### **The following are the general objectives of teaching poetry:**

1. To enable students to appreciate the beauty, rhyme and style of the poem.
2. To enable pupils to read aloud the poem with proper rhythm and intonation.
3. To enable students to enjoy recitation, individual or chorus of the poeni.
4. To make students understand the thought and imagination contained in the poem.
5. To train the emotions of students.
6. To create a love for English literature in them. 7. To develop their aesthetic sense.
8. According to Ryburn, "To give pleasure and thus to lay the foundation for an adequate, appreciation of English poetry which may come later."
9. According to Eastman, "To leave the child with a sense of satisfaction that comes from play, from absorption or from any spontaneous activity."

### **Methods of Teaching Poetry**

Teaching poetry has different objectives of the same topic, taught at different levels. The following are the main methods of teaching poetry :

1. Lecture method.
  2. Lecture-cum-song method.
  3. Question-answer method.
  4. Review method.
  5. Meaning and understanding method.
- The following techniques are used in teaching poetry :

1. Question-answer technique.
2. Model reading.
3. Explanation techniques.
4. Parallel quotation technique.
5. Review technique.
6. Narration technique.

### **Procedure of Poetry Teaching**

There is no particular method for teaching poetry. Each poetry needs an exclusive method and treatment. For teaching poetry, teacher should plan beforehand. A poem should be seen as a whole and not in parts. While teaching poetry teacher should be sparing of explanation as it is usually done by our language teachers. A short introductory talk in the mother-tongue of the students about the general ideas of the poem will serve as a stimulus to them to sing it completely. The poem selected for recitation should be really enjoyable. Children should not be compelled to learn a poem by heart. If the poem is enjoyable, they will learn it by heart, without realizing it that they are doing so.

Poetry cannot be taught, the teacher can only create conditions in which a poem may have its fullest significance for the pupils reading it. It is suggested that poetry reading should be used for enjoyment only and it should not be made a subject for examination. As far as possible the poem should be read as a whole but in the condition that poem is too long. It must be divided in units in such a way, so that it may not lose its rhythm, music and emotional effect.

### **Steps in Preparing a Poetry Lesson Plan**

No uniform method can be laid down for teaching of poetry. Each poem has to be treated individually. However, the following

General steps for the teaching of poetry may be suggested as follow:

- (1) Objectives: Objectives of the poem are to written in behavioural terms, the objective may vary from poem to poem depending upon the main theme of the poem.
- (2) Teaching Aids: A suitable teaching aid is to be selected and mentioned in the lesson plan. The material aid should be relevant and economical.

(3) Previous Knowledge: The previous knowledge, experiences and mental development of the students are ascertained and the same is mentioned in the Plan Book. It is on the basis of previous knowledge that the new lesson is to be introduced to the class. It is also known as entering behaviours.

(4) Introduction: To make students ready to read the poetry is called introduction. It differs according to the subject matter of the poetry. Thompson and Wyatt have suggested three ways of introduction :

1. The best method is to read a parallel poem, i.e., a poem similar in subject-matter with the poem to be taught. If possible, the parallel poem should be by the same poet.
2. One method is to give the gist of the poetry and then ask two or three simple questions on that.
3. The third method is to give the life-sketch, style and characteristics of the poet.

Some more-ways of introduction are as follows

- (a) The introduction can be done by playing some music,
- (b) The teacher can ask some questions on the previous knowledge students.

If the poem to be learnt is descriptive, a picture can be shown. Two or three questions on the picture should be asked.

Menon and Patel are of the view that introductory talk may be given in mother-tongue. Poem (parallel) too, can be in the mother-tongue. Whatever, method the teacher employs for Introduction, he should be particular about not to spoil the environment necessary for the poem.

(5) Statement of Aim : After making students curious to know about this poem by introduction, the teacher should state the aim briefly in clear words.

### **Presentation of the Poem**

Ryburn Says, "A good poem is a complete whole." So the poetry should be taught in the only one unit. The presentation stage consists of the following points:

- (1) **Presenting Gist of the Poem:** To make the student familiar with the theme and matter of the poem, the teacher tells the gist of the poem. It is presented in short, generally in few lines.

- (2) **Recitation or Model Reading by the Teacher:** The teacher recites the poem while students listen to him carefully with their books shut. This helps the pupils to follow the musical tone of the poem.

A Antony quotes the lines written in Hopkin's letter to his youngest brother about poetry that,

Poetry is the darling child of speech, of lip's spoken utterance: it must be spoken : till it is spoken, it is not performed, it does not perform, it is not itself."

These words throw light on the importance of loud reading of poems. A good teacher of English poetry should be familiar with the rhythm and intonation pattern of English language. The model reading by the teacher should help the students to experience or feel the poem in its totality without going into other details. Recitation is the soul of poetry. So it must be very effective.

- (3) **Pronunciation Drill:** The teacher conducts the pronunciation drill of the difficult words. First he himself pronounces the difficult words one by one and asks the students to pronounce the words correctly. He repeats this exercise till the students learn to pronounce the words correctly.
- (4) **Model Reading II:** A poem only exists for pupils if they hear and read it and thus feel the music and beauty of its language. The teacher should always remember that the medium of poetry is music and its subject matter is emotion. In poetry teaching what matters more is how it is read, so teacher should respond to the emotions of the poem. If he fails to do so, he will fail to create the right atmosphere for the poem. Therefore, model reading of the poem should be done twice or thrice, as wisely pointed out by Ryburn. "One reading, of course, is not enough. It must be read two or three times."
- (5) **Meaning of difficult Words and Phrases:** Teacher will tell the meaning of such difficult words and phrases which create hindrance, in the comprehension of the poem. His explanation should be only so much as may enable the pupils to have a general understanding of the poem. He should point out its beauty and force. Clear the reference involved, bring out the beauty of the figures of speech and throw light on the ideas involved.
- (6) **Model Reading III :** When the poem has been fully explained and discussed, the teacher should read the poem once again. This reading will have a greater effect on the pupils because much has already been said about the poem.
- (7) **Imitation Reading by the Pupils:** After reading the poem, the teacher should ask two or three pupils one by one to read the poem. He should help them to recite it with effect,

caring about their pronunciation, intonation, rise and fall of the voice. This will enable them to feel the music and beauty of its language.

(8) (a) **Comprehension Questions:** The purpose of the comprehension questions is to know if the meaning of the poem is clear to students and to make certain ideas more clear. These questions should be simple and should not break the continuity of the poem. Their number depends upon the length and ideas of the poem.

(b) **Appreciation Questions:** Appreciation questions are to make clear the (i) beauty, (ii) feeling, (iii) main idea of the poem. These questions text'should include:

- (i) Appreciation of the beauty of thought.
- (ii) Appreciation of the beauty of the images. (iii) Appreciation of the beauty of emotions. (iv) Appreciation of the beauty of the style and language.

(9) **Choral Recitation:** The pupils will recite the poem in chorus. It helps them in overcoming shyness. Later on they can recite it independently. It also heightens aural effect which is necessary for appreciation. Besides, it helps in emotional release, development of eloquence and fluency. Moreover, children find it a source of enjoyment.

**10. Assignment:** There is not much importance of assignment in poetry teaching. The teacher may ask to memorize the lines of the poem or to write the gist of the poem. The assignment can be related to some creative work too.

Preparing a lesson plan according to the steps written above, a teacher can enjoy to teach a poem and pupils will also get pleasure by understanding the thought and feelings conveyed in the poem. For successful teaching of poetry, advice of Alexander Hadow should be followed, "Read each poem twice, give the children time to form their own impressions, invite them to criticize and help them in doing so. Let the poetry period be, as far as possible a period of joy, a period of pondering over things they love already. Let them choose for themselves the poems they are to learn by heart, each choosing his own favourites. Thus, only can we develop a taste for poetry and train their care to the variety of beautiful sounds. Thus, only can we rouse in them some idea of the wealth of poetry that lies before them. Remember that we must aim at turning out readers of poetry, not students of poetry."

Billows has written, "To leave poetry out of language course it to renounce an extremely effective and labour saving method of absorbing useful language. It is also to abandon

opportunities to humanize and warm what otherwise may be a very dray and chilly traffic in words and information. It is to renounce the hope of delivering us from the pedestrian writing—if not platitudes—of the text-book writer. It is to neglect an important and powerful aid in establishing in the pupil's mind a favourable mental set. It is to stop short of what might be most rewarding in the pupil's experience of language.”

From the Billows recommendations and the comparison of the two school of thought bring out the fact that the arguments in favour of teaching poetry outweigh those against it. It is true that objectives of teaching and learning English in India are utilitarian. It is also true that the language and contents of English poetry are unusual. Yet there is no justification for excluding poetry from the school English course. There is an immense value of teaching poetry in English language course at the secondary school level it tends to develop the emotional, imaginative and aesthetic sides of student's personality. They enjoy poetry if it is taught well.

### **Learning exercise**

- Definition the term 'Poetry'. Enumerate the characteristics of poetry. Differentiate it with prose teaching.
- Enumerate the advantages and importance of poetry teaching
- Describe the general and specific objectives of teaching poetry at secondary and high school levels.
- Enumerate the objectives of teaching poetry.
- Describe and enumerate the procedure and steps of teaching poetry. Indicate its advantage