

## **LANGUAGE IS THE BODY OF THE THOUGHT**

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The goal of the English class, through the use of beautiful texts, is to gain an understanding of human nature. This knowledge acquired through good literature will be a powerful help for our spiritual life. It also helps us become accustomed to express beautifully, either orally or in writing, ideas and sentiments which are accurate and personal. The goal of the English class is not to form scholars or specialists, but to acquire some mastery of our own tongue.

As a consequence, spelling and grammar do not come first in teaching English. They have to be understood as tools, never disconnected from the expression of ideas. Language is an instrument to communicate thought.

### **1. READING ALOUD TO THE CLASS**

Language is primarily spoken. This is why the teaching of language, as an art imitating nature, must use the spoken or phonetic form of words as the primary means for teaching reading. Reading aloud should be the first way of testing reading comprehension, of making the learner familiar with the role of punctuation marks, or engaging the learner in the full emotional experience that literature ought to yield, or providing an appreciation for the cadenced and hence ordered character of all works of the mind. One can teach a pupil to put a period at the end of a sentence by first identifying the end of a sentence as a place where one drops one's voice.

Not only should the students read aloud, but the teacher should also read to the class. This can be done at the end of the day. The children always look forward to a good story. It is also an excellent way to train them to thoughtful listening. Once, Father Finn, SJ, was given a difficult class. He found that the best way to obtain discipline was to read them a story as a reward for good behavior.

Reading aloud can be an excellent homework assignment as well. Parents and other siblings can easily listen for five minutes a day. This is an excellent way to show children that reading is important to the family, too.

"Some understanding of the importance of reading well aloud, and of what is important in it.

Courage to admit to our hearers that we have some feeling of sympathy with what we are reading a thing some appear to feel bound in honor to keep as a dark secret.

Some realization of the effects of good reading in developing things that have their springs very deep: self-control, patience, consideration for others, active thought for them, positively and negatively. We have to remember that we read for them, not for ourselves, and so must not put too much of our personal idiosyncrasies into our reading lest it may jar on them. It teaches the necessity of consideration for our author and our audience and forgetfulness of ourselves."

The teacher, who can do justice to a story, approaches in power the rhapsodist.

The pupils will not only listen to her, but will hang breathlessly upon her every word as upon a rhapsodist's. In this way the teacher will not only win their interest, but infuse into their soul sympathy with what is great and noble, and enthusiastic devotion to high ideals."

## **2. THE ROLE OF GRAMMAR**

Grammar is the study of a language, spoken or written. First, of the elements which constitute this language: this is morphology. Secondly, of the functions and relations which link the elements to one another is syntax.

Grammar could be called a descriptive knowledge. What is the object of this description? The elements of the language and their arrangements, therefore the structure of the language, its constructions, the diagrams, the models in which human thought is expressed, since language is the body of the thought.

The study of grammar, while indispensable, is secondary in the study of any language, beginning with our own. Before all else, through the contact with great works of literature, the goals of the English class are to root us in a tradition, and to make us discern the true nature of man. It is also to teach us how to express ourselves. Besides, even to express ourselves correctly, the study of grammar does not suffice in itself; it is an auxiliary, and nothing more. Reading great writers teaches us more on this level, owing to a prolonged and frequent contact with beautiful language.

As a consequence, we should seldom if ever isolate the study of grammar from the study of a text. It is very important to connect this technical study of the language to the expression of thought, since grammar is but an instrument.

However, we must be careful never to do grammatical exercises taken from a poem. A poem is a work of art; but in dissecting it into subjects, direct objects, adverbs, prepositions, etc. It is a destruction of the music of the words, and an annihilation of its transcendence, that is, what it tells us beyond words.

## **3. THE STUDY OF SPELLING**

Of course, it is necessary to learn spelling, but we should never dissociate this study from a text, where words are included in a sentence and the sentence in a text. When we understand the text well, it helps to understand the words used to express the thought. The "context" is indispensable to the true understanding of the word. It will also help to memorize the spelling of a word. When this word is seen in the context of a beautiful sentence, this beautiful sentence has a better chance to strike our mind, and thus to inscribe itself more deeply in our memory, rather than if it is in the middle of a list of dry and disconnected words, without soul or life.

To study our language does not mean to dissect it into a multiplicity of material elements, separated from one another. Such a study, far from leading to a better comprehension of the language, presents the danger of reducing it to something merely material, whereas its fundamental role is to convey thought. Language allows a mind to communicate with another mind. It is a matter of spiritual communication, which needs words, and yet transcends words.