

Reading and Appreciation of Don Quixote in a Spanish-as-a-Foreign-Language Class

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present a way in which the Spanish literary work Don Quixote de la Mancha can be presented to a class of English speaking students who are leaning Spanish as a foreign language. After students understand the reading they can interact in the class activities following. They will engage in an analysis and appreciation of the chapter through specific activities. They will be exposed to Chapter 8 of the book, which deals with the windmills in Don Quixote's way. Don Quixote is a human prototype, and as such, it deserves to be studied and analyzed. From the cognitive linguistic point of view, reading, understanding, analyzing, and discussing a literary work in a language other than one's own is no simple task. Hence the approach offered through this paper in order to aid those involved in teaching Spanish in an English-speaking context.

Key words: Knight errant, humor literature, romance chivalry, windmills, disappointment, adventure

Introduction

Don Quixote, written by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra in two volumes, in 1605 and 1615, respectively, is considered the most important Spanish literary work of all time. This is a work of humor literature, that is to say, a work that satirizes chivalry novels, but in a way that is intelligent and sharp, and at the same time contains elements of social criticism. The long conversations that take place between Don Quixote and Sancho Panza throughout their adventures have resulted not only in many sayings and maxims that are still used at the present time, but also in acute daily observations and tips for living well, as a good citizen. At this moment in history in which teenagers and young people are not very prone to reading books due to the internet availability around the globe, and much less reading literary works that are as old as 400 years as Don Quixote is, it has become imperative to search for new alternatives to involve our new generations in the reading and appreciation of classic literary works such as Don Quixote.

At the same time, when it comes to reading and appreciating Don Quixote by a public that is not native of the Spanish language, it is necessary to implement creative approaches that will make young students enjoy this timeless masterpiece and at the same time learn through and from it. Don Quixote is a piece of literary work worth knowing for a student of Spanish as a foreign language, something to be read. With that objective in mind, the purpose of this paper is to present a lesson plan designed for the reading and appreciation of the book's Chapter 8, the "windmills" chapter. It has been chosen for this study and analysis because it is more universally known and even represented in graphic form. This is a lesson plan to be presented in a literature class of Spanish as a foreign language in an English-speaking locality. The purpose is to present this chapter of the book in a creative and attractive manner for the students to enjoy the class activity while gaining relevant insights from the actual reading of the book.

Following is the lesson plan in detail, showing the activities to be realized in class for the reading, comprehension and discussion of Chapter 8. This plan should be presented by a native Spanish-speaking instructor who clearly understands the foreign language learning setting in which he and his class are participating. This instructor should guide the lesson in a pleasant way, so that the students enjoy the reading as an enriching experience. They will be able to learn not only grammatical, literary, or cultural content, but even the mentality belonging to the fifteenth century. With good guidance, the students can achieve a lot more than just reading the chapter. They can interact in an active way and collaborate in the lesson development.

1. Lesson Plan for Don Quixote Chapter 8

Lesson Plan for Reading and Appreciating Don Quixote

Title of the Lesson: Reading and Appreciation of Don Quixote de la Mancha

Lesson Theme: Reading and Understanding Chapter 8, “the windmills”

Lesson Extension: Class Period of 120 minutes

Language Level: Advanced

Area of Study: Spanish-as-a-foreign-language Literature class in an English-speaking locality

Objective: The students should understand the chapter so as to be able to appreciate Chapter 8 and interact in a discussion/analysis, to finally write a composition in which they express their feeling and personal opinion on the chapter studied.

2. Introduction to the Lesson

Warm up: Review of previous chapters already read

The class instructor will begin by asking some questions about the previous lessons already studied about Don Quixote to as many students as possible. The purpose of this activity is to have students remember details that will be important for the new lesson. The instructor will ask these questions and others that come up and that are relevant to Chapter 8. This warm up session will take around 10 minutes approximately. The time dedicated to this activity has to be highly interactive and conversational. The students at this level are supposed to have the training for an activity like this, since it is an advanced language level. The English translation will be provided for each sentence.

Warm-up Questions

1. De lo que hemos leído hasta ahora, ¿qué piensas de Don Quijote?
[Of all the chapters that we have already read, what do you think of Don Quixote?]
2. De lo que hemos leído hasta ahora, ¿qué piensas de Sancho Panza?
[Of all the things we already know about this novel, what do you think about Sancho Panza?]
3. ¿Qué diferencia importante has visto entre Don Quijote y Sancho Panza hasta ahora?
[What striking differences can you point out between Don Quixote and Sancho Panza so far?]
4. Hasta ahora, ¿qué rasgo del carácter de Don Quijote te gusta más?
[What traits in the character of Don Quixote do you like best?]
5. ¿A qué rasgos del carácter de Don Quijote te opones?
[What traits in the character of Don Quixote do you oppose and why?]
6. ¿Qué rasgos del carácter de Sancho Panza admiras?
[What traits in the character of Sancho Panza do you admire?]
7. ¿Te consideras más un idealista o una persona realista?
[Do you consider yourself more of an idealist or a down-to-earth person?]

3. Vocabulary Study

After the warm-up activity and before the students start reading Chapter 8, they will work in pairs to do vocabulary work. They will first look up some words and expressions in the dictionary. They will then use those words and expressions in sentences of their own. The idea behind this activity is that the students understand the new words of the reading selection before they do the actual reading. The students are expected to clearly understand these new words and expressions after they finish the activity.

They will carry out the activity speaking in Spanish. The instructor will walk around checking to see if there is any need for clarifications or explanations. This vocabulary session is expected to take some 20 minutes.

Look up the following words and expressions in the dictionary, write the definition, and then give an example of that word or expression:

1) Molino

Definition: _____

Example: _____

2) Gigante

Definition: _____

Example: _____

3) Aspas

Definition: _____

Example: _____

4) Desaforado

Definition: _____

Example: _____

5) Rodela

Definition: _____

Example: _____

6) Lanza en ristre

Definition: _____

Example: _____

7) Arremeter

Definition: _____

Example: _____

All these words and expressions are related to the realm of romance chivalry, of Knights-errant, of Don Quixote and Sancho riding along and having humorous adventures many times. The students are already knowledgeable of the tenor of the story. Nevertheless, the instructor will always be ready to lead the activity in the direction of the content of the chapter they will soon be reading. Posters or pictures of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza and the windmills scene on the classroom walls can be a valid option in order to make the chapter more graphic for the students. This way they can approach the chapter with a clear idea in mind concerning the use of the vocabulary. Remind students that these are lexical items of the XV century.

4. Reading Comprehension of Chapter 8

After the vocabulary exercise, each student will be given a copy of Don Quixote's Chapter 8 for their personal use. They will read the chapter out loud, and will take turns to read the sections assigned by the instructor. During the reading activity, the instructor will make any comments or clarifications deemed necessary for the students to understand the situation in the chapter. At the same time, the instructor will ask probing questions to make sure that nothing is left unanswered. His goal is to get the students to understand Chapter 8 well. This section of the lesson will take up some 40 minutes which include reading, comments, clarifications, and questions and answers period. The focus of this activity is the windmills scene. Read Chapter 8.

Understanding the text

Following the reading segment, the instructor will help the class transition towards the analysis of Chapter 8. The entire activity is to be done conversationally in Spanish in a manner that does not prove threatening for the class. The students have to feel confident after reading the text, knowing that they can comment on it and express their opinions. Since the windmills scene is rich in psychological content, the instructor is to expect unusual questions, and he will also ask probing questions regarding character traits. The activity will last for approximately 40 minutes.

First Activity

1. Ask the class their opinion on how they think Don Quixote perceives the windmills that for him are enemy forces.
2. Ask the class what causes Don Quixote's error of perception.
3. Remind the class that due to an illness, Don Quixote's imagination is distorted. That is why he sees things in a rather unconventional way. Ask them to bear that in mind.
4. Explain that the people who usually perceive things in an unconventional way are the poets.
5. The instructor will guide half of the class to write quixotic or imaginative descriptions of ordinary objects.
6. The other half of the class will try to find out what object is behind the unusual descriptions.

Second Activity

The instructor will ask the class to think of objects that can be seen as if they were other things. They have to use their imagination to come up with creative ideas. In order to stimulate their thoughts, he can give them ideas, like for instance,

1. An old piano covered with a blanket that is thought to be a _____
2. A toaster without any bread inside that is thought to be a _____
3. A lamp shade lying on the street that is thought to be a _____
4. An old bicycle that is thought to be a _____
5. An old tractor lying forgotten in the field that is thought to be a _____

With this guideline, the students can now produce their own imaginative and creative ideas.

Third Activity

With the imaginative definitions that the class has come up with in the **Second Activity**, the students should be ready to elaborate on that and write metaphoric descriptions of their objects either in prose or in verse. The instructor will always be available for any necessary help. It is recommended that he moves around checking the students' work, asking and answering questions, accompanying the process in an active and participatory way. All the time the classwork is to be carried out in Spanish. The students must be familiar with the concept of metaphors, similes, and comparison in literature.

Fourth Activity

When the students have completed the exercise, the instructor will give them a chance to read their prose or poetry to another student. The student listening to the description will have to find out what ordinary object the writer is describing under the surface of his prose or poetry. If there is enough time, the instructor can allot some minutes for the class to improve their metaphorical descriptions among themselves, helping one another. To conclude this section, the instructor will guide the class to choose which description is the most creative, that is to say, the one that sounds more imaginative and unusual. This activity is preparation for the next.

Extended Activity: Comparison Exercise

Students will be given a handout for the extended activity following the previous creative writing. They will be expected to fill in the blanks for this exercise. This time they are to create shorter comparisons using words such as *como* (like, as), *semejante a* (similar to), *parece* (seems) to complete the meanings of the sentences. The activity should be quick and dynamic, and the instructor may create an atmosphere of humor since the chapter they have just read contains an element of humor. The sentences to be completed are the following:

1. Los molinos de viento son como _____ porque _____

[Windmills are like _____ because _____.]

2. La pantalla de la lámpara tirada en la calle parece _____ porque _____

[The lamp shade lying on the street seems _____ because _____.]

3. Don Quijote se comporta como _____ porque _____.

[Don Quixote behaves like _____ because _____.]

4. Sancho es semejante a _____ cuando _____.

[Sancho is similar to _____ when he _____.]

5. Sancho Panza se comporta como _____ porque _____.

[Sancho Panza behaves like _____ because he _____.]

5. Applying the New Knowledge

General Discussion of Chapter 8

Following the extended activity on comparisons the instructor will carry out the general discussion on Chapter 8 through guided questions. He will be the moderator as the students give their opinions in a conversational way. According to the answers he gets, the instructor can expand the ideas with more questions related to the topic under discussion. The activity is expected to take some 15 minutes. Sometimes the discussion can lead to other topics relevant to the students. The instructor has to be alert to guide the questions and answers in ways that will be helpful and productive for the class.

Discussion questions – Some examples

1. ¿Cuál, a tu criterio, es el mensaje central que el autor ha querido transmitir en este capítulo?

[Which, in your opinion, is the central message the author wants to convey in this chapter?]

2. ¿Te parece que Don Quijote está realmente loco, o finge su comportamiento?

[Do you think Don Quixote is really crazy, or does he just feign his behavior?]

3. ¿Qué valor moral en el carácter de Don Quijote se resalta en este capítulo?

[What moral trait in Don Quixote's character is outstanding in this chapter?]

4. ¿Te identificas más con Don Quijote o con Sancho Panza en este capítulo? ¿Por qué?

[Do you identify more with Don Quixote or with Sancho Panza in this chapter? Why?]

5. ¿Te parece que Sancho Panza es un destructor de ilusiones o sueños? ¿Por qué piensas así?

[Would you say that Sancho Panza is a destroyer of illusions or dreams? Why do you think so?]

6. ¿Te consideras una persona realista o idealista? ¿Por qué?

[Do you consider yourself a realist or an idealist? Why?]

7. ¿Qué es lo que más/menos te ha gustado de este Capítulo 8? ¿Por qué?

[What do you like best/least about this chapter? Why?]

Discussion Extension

The instructor can lead the discussion now to a more contemporary tone, and point out that Don Quixote can be taken for a lunatic because of the way he perceives things, as opposed to Sancho Panza, or maybe he just pretends to be crazy in order not to compromise his ideals in his quest to bring justice and fairness to the land. The instructor then can mention the fact that in our modern world there are people who are like Don Quixote, who have not compromised their ideals. He can mention names such as Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. The instructor can start the discussion to find out whether the class considers Don Quijote worthy of being in the company of such great idealists of our times or if he is just a simple person of illusory ideals, according to what they already know about him and his personality.

6. Writing Skills: Composition

By now the students will be familiar with all the intricacies of Chapter 8. Thus they are ready to record their ideas and opinions on paper. The instructor will explain the final activity of the day and will hand out a piece of paper to each student. The paper will contain an introductory sentence followed by blank space in which the students are to write their composition on the topic. The paper will also contain a final sentence that will begin the conclusion paragraph. The students will be given a limited period of time in which to jot down their perception of the chapter they have read. This time the instructor will remain seated just waiting for the students to finish the exercise. Once the activity starts, there will be no guidance or explanations.

Following is the model paper for the composition activity. All instructions will be given in Spanish. The students are expected to read the instructions and proceed to the exercise without any difficulty. They are supposed to be familiar with this type of activity. The instructor will explain the activity orally, answering any questions that might come up. Once the students get started, no questions will be answered any longer. This model will be shown at the end of the paper as an annex so as to be better seen and appreciated.

Composition

Tema: Capítulo 8 de Don Quijote de la Mancha, sobre los molinos de viento

[**Topic:** Chapter 8 of Don Quixote, about the windmills]

Tarea de clase: Escribir una composición de unas 200 palabras, dentro del marco presentado

[**Class Activity:** Write a Composition of about 200 words, inside the frame presented]

Introduction

En este capítulo, lo que más/menos me gusta a respecto de Don Quijote es
porque

[In this chapter, what I like best / dislike most about Don Quixote is because]

[The students will write their composition in the blank spaces].

Conclusion

A mí me gustaría/no me gustaría ser como Don Quijote porque.....

[I would /would not like to be like Don Quixote because.....]

7. Lesson Conclusion: Wrap-up

To conclude the day activity, the instructor will collect the composition work –which will be just one page in extension. He will pick one that is in favor of being like Don Quixote, and one that is against that wish. He will proceed to read both papers and after that the students can give a round of applause to the two compositions. The instructor then can hand out a nice picture of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza with the windmills, so that they can remember the class activity in a graphic form. In this way the instructor wraps up the lesson. The idea behind all this is that the students had enjoyed the lesson and the time they interacted learning about Don Quixote a little more. This is the end of the lesson presenting Chapter 8 of Don Quijote de la Mancha. The relevant point is to achieve the objectives of the lesson, that is not limited just to the Reading of the chapter, but also to the analysis, and the general comprehension of Chapter 8, for the follow-up activity of general discussion and finally the written composition to take a stand in wanting or not wanting to be like the main character of the story. For students who are English native speakers to carry out the entire lesson in Spanish, while they are still in the process of learning the language, this counts as a huge step and one that should be commended by the instructor. If this activity is done in an orderly and detailed way, the students can profit greatly from the lesson. A good understanding of Lesson 8 can aid them not only in understanding what they read, but also in extending their oral linguistic skills so that they can express their ideas and opinions in regards to the character, personality traits and behavior of Don Quixote in Chapter 8. In a foreign language learning situation it is extremely important that students be able to read literary texts that are representative of that language and the culture that comes with the language. This factor will enrich the student's learning.

Conclusion

The main objective of this paper has been to present a model lesson on how to teach a highly representative chapter of Don Quixote de la Mancha. The content and the text in general are oriented to a literature class in a setting of learning Spanish as a foreign language at an advanced level in an English-speaking country. For this the students must have completed at least two years of non-stop Spanish language studies. A firm linguistic foundation is required to participate in a class of this level. Any lesson activity that is well designed and well prepared by the instructor will undoubtedly contributes positively to the students' learning and advancement.

The main motivation for the preparation and design of this didactic/pedagogic lesson plan comes out of the need to fill the void that exists in the existence of lessons of literary content when it comes to teaching Spanish as a foreign language. This lesson plan can work as a guideline, from which many other plans can be designed for other literary Works. Spanish is rich in literary works and content, a fact can be used as an advantage in class. There are numerous works that are representative of the language that can be read, analyzed and discussed by students. Spanish literature has been awarded eleven Nobel prizes in literature. This is an indicator of the importance of literature in this language, a fact that has to be taken into consideration. In situations where it is possible to realize more varied activities, the learning of Spanish can be complemented with poetry, theater, and other literary disciplines.

The idea is to always help the students to go a step forward in their Spanish language acquisition and learning, so they can feel confident, motivated, and challenged to keep on growing and advancing. The main challenge in this didactic model is that the language instructors produce their own literary material so as to teach in their classes more classic and representative Spanish literary works.

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Annex

Composición

Tema: Capítulo 8 de Don Quijote de la Mancha, sobre los molinos de viento

Tarea de clase: Escribir una composición de unas 200 palabras, dentro del marco presentado

En este capítulo, lo que más/menos me gusta a respecto de Don Quijote es

A mí me gustaría/no me gustaría ser como Don Quijote porque