

RESPONDING TO LITERARY TEXTS THROUGH POETRY WRITING

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Abstract

There are various ways in which readers respond to literature. This article discusses how readers (students in particular) can express their ideas and thoughts about the literary texts they have read through poetry writing. It begins with an overview of reader response theory and the field of literary response research, followed by a discussion of oral and written forms of readers' responses to literature and a classroom activity that requires students to express their thoughts about literary characters in poetic forms. The article also highlights students' proficiency, and literacy and literary skills as some of the factors that need to be considered when using poetry writing as a way of responding to literature.

Keywords: reader response theory, literary response research, poetry writing, literary text

Introduction

There is a substantial body of research that investigates readers' responses to literature. Louis M Rosenblatt (1978), David Bleich (1978), Stanley Fish (1970), Norman Holland and Wolfgang Iser (cited in Tompkins, 1980) are some of the prominent scholars in this field of study. These scholars are the key proponents of the reader response theory that champions readers' subjective rather than objective response to literary texts.¹ They believe that the reader, the text, and a wide range of factors all play a major role in the process of responding to literature.

There are, as Beach and Hynds (1991) posit, at least three points to consider when one thinks about the process of responding to literary texts:

- Readers can respond to texts in various ways (e.g., symbolic interpretation, asking questions, problem solving)
- Readers can bring different attitudes and values to their reading (e.g., personal attitudes (like/dislike; negative/positive), personal orientations and reasons for reading (self or information-driven))
- Readers' responses are influenced by a variety of factors (e.g., gender, experience, knowledge, curricular, teacher and the environment)

Moss (2003) categorises the different ways in which readers respond to literature into two main types: oral and written forms. Discussion, questioning strategies and dramatic activities make up the oral form of literary response while writing response journal and written retelling of stories are examples of written form of literary response.

Moss's (2003) view is consistent with Bleeker and Bleeker's (1996) claim that students can respond to literature (particularly fiction) through writing poetry. "Poetic forms," as