



USING DRAMATIC METHODS TO TEACH POETRY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: THE ELEYO HIGH SCHOOL, IKERE, EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

In many Nigerian secondary schools, poetry classes are quiet, dull, and full of sleeping students. Teachers talk, students copy notes, and nobody understands the poem. This study shows how adding role play, improvised music, movement, and group participation can turn poetry into a lively, memorable lesson. The study was conducted at Eleyo High School, Ikere, using Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken". We used Geraldine Siks' process-concept structural approach, which means planning activities so every student joins in through perceiving, responding, imagining, improvising, communicating, and evaluating. The class became a chorus, with students clapping, stamping, and beating tables as drums. Local songs like Paul IK Dairo's "Mo Sori ire" framed the poem. Key lines became repeated chants. After the lesson, students took a short test and scored an average of 60%, a big jump from past performance. More importantly, they were awake, laughing, and discussing the poem's meaning. Dramatic methods work because they change attention from "voluntary", forcing yourself to listen to "involuntary" listening because the activity is fun. The study recommends that teachers use what they have: hands, feet, tables, local songs, and semi-circles. You don't need a stage or money. You need a plan that involves every child. When poetry has rhythm, movement, and group voice, it stops being abstract. It becomes a story students live. This helps them pass exams, but also builds self-discipline, imagination, teamwork, and confidence. For schools losing students from literature, drama is not an extra. It is the way back. The classroom should be a place of joy, not sleep. With improvised music and movement, poetry wakes up. And when poetry wakes up, students do too.

Keywords: Dramatic Methods, Role Play, Movement, Improvisation, Music, Teaching, Poetry.



Introduction

The way knowledge is passed matters. If the method is boring, the knowledge never gets to the students. Students miss it, sleep through it, or forget it after the test. This is a big problem in literature classes, especially when teaching poetry. That is why many secondary school students think poetry is boring, hard, and not for them. They sleep in class or skip literature exams because poems feel like puzzles with no answers. Poetry is often seen as the hardest part of literature. Students call it “abstract” and “not real”. In most secondary schools in Ikere, records show that fewer students are choosing literature in the Senior Secondary WAEC exam over the last five years. When asked why, many said poetry chased them away. The words are strange. The meanings are hidden. The teaching style makes it worse as the teacher talks, students listen, and nobody moves. This results in bored faces, sleeping heads, and empty exam halls. The reason was simple: the method of teaching did not involve them.

The Encarta Encyclopedia says teaching is the “systematic presentation of facts, skills, and techniques to students” (Microsoft, 2009). But if the presentation is only talking, many students miss it. The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary says teaching is “the job of a teacher” (Hornby et al., 2010). But the job must change when the students change. Today’s students live with music, phones, and movement. A teacher who only talks is like a radio with no song and can be easy to ignore.

Stephen Inegbe says theatre is the “best tested practical approach towards the attainment of educational objectives” (Inegbe, 2003, p. 82). He warns that schools without drama will have “sterile” growth. Yet most literature classes still use the old way: read the poem, explain words, and copy notes. That method asks for “voluntary attention”. The student must force himself to listen. Adeyemo S.P.O says that’s hard. Students get bored and start fiddling (Adeyemo, 1976, p. 44).

Dramatic methods mean using role play, choral reading, improvisation, songs, dance, and group work to teach. The idea is old. Aristotle talked about it. Modern scholars like Stephen Inegbe say theatre is “the best tested practical approach towards the attainment of educational objectives”. He warns that schools that ignore drama will have “sterile” growth. Dramatic methods ask for “involuntary attention”. The student listens because he’s busy clapping, singing, or answering. He doesn’t have to force it. The activity pulls him in. Adeyemo lists three ways to hold attention: change your method, use dramatization and pictures, and use “learning-by-doing” (Adeyemo, 1976, p. 44). This study uses all three.

Five poems from different poets were presented to the students. We chose Robert Frost’s “The Road Not Taken” because students call it confusing. We turned it into a short classroom drama with three scenes with familiar names. We used Geraldine Siks’ process-concept structural approach. That means we planned so students would perceive, respond, imagine, improvise, communicate, and evaluate (Siks, 1977, p. 4). Everyone had a job: some acted as Tunde and Segun, others were the chorus, and others kept the beat. We added Paul IK Dairo’s “Mo Sori ire” because it’s familiar and has a strong rhythm. The



chorus repeated, “Choices we make in life matter. Be careful.” That line became the theme song. Tables became drums. Stamping feet became bass. No money was spent.

After the drama, we gave a test. Two questions, 15 minutes. The class teacher marked it and the students scored 60% Average. Then we asked branching questions like “Which traveler made a better choice?” and students answered freely. The room was alive. This article explains how we did it and why it worked. The problem was boredom, sleep, and dropping WAEC numbers. The cause was non-participatory teaching. The solution was drama, very practical, cheap, and fun.

Pemberton-Billing and Clegg say child drama lets students express reactions and evaluate them (Pemberton-Billing & Clegg, 1965, p. 17). That’s what happened. Students didn’t just hear about choices. They acted them, sang them, and then talked about them. Their ideas got “sharpened, focused and properly coordinated”. This matters for all subjects, not just literature. If students can learn poetry by doing, they can learn history, science, and math by doing. But we start with poetry because that’s where the sleep is deepest. The goal of this paper is to give teachers a simple, no-cost way to beat boredom. You don’t need a theatre. You need a method. Change your method, and you change the class.

Theoretical Framework

We follow Geraldine Siks’ process-concept structural approach to drama. Siks says drama in class is not for a show. It’s for learning. The process is what matters. The teacher designs activities that make students use six things: perceiving, responding, imagining, improvising/creating, communicating, and evaluating (Siks, 1977, p. 4).

1. **Perceiving:** Students use senses — hear the drum, see the actor, feel the rhythm.
2. **Responding:** They answer back — clap, chant, move.
3. **Imagining:** They picture the two roads, the yellow wood, the choice.
4. **Improvising:** They make up actions — how Tunde walks, how Taiwo cries.
5. **Communicating:** They share meaning with others; the chorus tells the class.
6. **Evaluating:** They think back “Which choice was better?”

Siks says this approach fits all children because it “takes care of the group’s multifarious composition” (Siks, 1977, p. 4). Fast learners, slow learners, shy, loud, all have a place. The teacher is sensitive to each child and explores “along with the player”. The teacher is not above, but beside. This is different from normal teaching, which often wants one right answer. Process-concept drama wants participation. McCaslin says drama lets children “assume responsibilities, accept group decisions, work together cooperatively” (McCaslin,



1987, p. 16). In our chorus, a child with a weak voice was fine because others sang too. A shy child moved his feet and still joined. No one felt alone.

Peter Slade says drama tells the teacher “who and what the child is” (Slade, 1980, p. 105). It gives the child “emotional and physical control, confidence, and ability to observe, tolerate and consider others”. He warns it is not idleness. It is the child’s way of thinking, working, and absorbing. If we block it, we block learning.

Heinig and Stillwell quote the Children’s Theater Association of America: child drama is “improvisational, non-exhibitional, process-centered” (Heinig & Stillwell, 1981, p. 4). Key words: non-exhibitional and process-centered. We are not making a show for parents. We are making learning for students. The doing is the teaching. Pemberton-Billing and Clegg add that drama lets the individual “express his reaction to the impressions he receives” and then learn to “evaluate them” (Pemberton-Billing & Clegg, 1965, p. 17). Evaluation is reflection. After our drama, students reflected through branching questions. That fixed the learning.

So, the theory says: plan drama that involves all six steps. Make sure it’s not a performance. Make sure every child does something. Use the body, voice, and group. Then reflect. If you do that, the child learns with his whole self — head, heart, and hands. That’s the process-concept structural approach, and it’s why our Eleyo High School experiment worked.

The Experiment

The Original Poem: *The Road Not Taken* (Robert Frost)

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;
Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,
And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.
I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-



I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.
Education Place

The Adaptation for Classroom Teaching: Poem to Drama

CHARACTERS: Tunde, Segun, CHORUS-CLASS

Scene I

(The class is clapping rhythmically and singing Paul IK Dairo's song, "Mo Sori ire".
They stop as Tunde stands and steps out)

Tunde:

This life is full of ups and down.
In everything you do in life, there are two things involved.
Success or failure. There are always choices to be made.
Be careful before making such choices.
The wise choice you make today,
Takes you to your success of tomorrow,
While the wrong choice leads to your failure of tomorrow.
(PAUSE) Two choices: to live or to die;
To succeed or to fail;
To struggle hard and be successful in life;
Or be lazy and remain poor.

Chorus: (Class)

Life is full of choices
Whether in the house or in school
Choices we make in life matter.
Language, diction, symbolism, repetition and allegory.
Choices we make in life matter.
Be careful.

Segun:

Yes be very careful.
Watch closely before deciding.
The options may be confusing.
With courage and determination,
You can make a better choice.

Song: (Class)

Mo Sori ire
Mo Sori ire
Mo Sori ire

Your whole life is about choosing.
It is not what you do in a hurry.
It is a risk-taking venture.



It calls for carefulness.

Choose wisely.

Chorus: (Class)

Life is full of choices.

Whether in school or at home

Choices we make in life matter.

Language, diction, symbolism, repetition and allegory.

Choices we make in life matter.

FADE

Scene II

Segun:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood.

And sorry I could not travel both.

Chorus :(Class)

The choices we make in life matter.

Choose wisely

Segun: (Nods)

And be one traveler long I stood.

And looked down on as far as I could

To where it bent in the undergrowth.

Chorus :(Class)

Choices we make in life matter

Be careful

Segun:

Then took the other as just as fair

And having perhaps the better claim

Because it was grassy and I wanted to wear

Chorus:

Choices we make in life matter

Be careful

Segun:

Though as for that the passing there

Had worn them about the same

Nseh: (From Far End)

And both that morning equally lay

In leaves no step had trodden.

Chorus: (Class)

Life is full of choices.

Whether in school or at home

Choices we make matter

Be careful

Segun:



Oh, I kept the first for another day
Yet knowing how way leads on to way
I doubt if I should even come back.

Chorus:

Choices we make in life matter.
Be careful.

FADE

Scene III (30 years later)

Taiwo: (OLD AND POOR)

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence.
Two roads diverged in a wood and I...I...I..... (Crying).

Segun: (Old, Happy and Rich)

I took the one less traveled by
And that has made all the difference.

Chorus: (Class)

Life is full of choices
Whether in school or in the house
Choices we make matters.
Be careful

(THE CLASS IS IN A HAPPY AND JOYOUS MOOD AS THEY DANCE, AMIDST CLAPPING AND SINGING OF KIMONO'S SONG, WITH SEGUN, WHILE TAIWO IS SAD, HEAD BOWED CLASS SINGING PAUL IK Dairo's "Mo Sori ire" "Mo Sori ire" "Mo Sori ire")

END

Analysis

We broke the work into four parts: adaptation, presentation, testing, and discussion.

1. Adaptation: From Poem to Classroom Drama

We kept Frost's words but added structure. Scene I introduced the idea of choice with Tunde and the chorus. Scene II put the poem's lines into Imeh's mouth, with the chorus echoing, "Choices we make in life matter. Be careful." Scene III showed the result 30 years later: Segun rich and happy, Taiwo poor and crying.

Why this structure? Siks says learning must be "thoughtfully planned, structured and guided" (Siks, 1977, p. 11). We started with the music "Mo Sori ire" to grab involuntary attention. We ended with a dance to bring joy. Joy helps memory. We used local names, Tunde, Segun, Taiwo, so students saw themselves. The poem stopped being foreign.



The chorus was key. Everybody sang. McCaslin says in a chorus, “the speech handicapped may recite without embarrassment because he is not speaking alone” (McCaslin, 1987, p. 114). That’s inclusion.

2. Presentation: Rhythm, Movement, and Semi-Circle

Students sat in a semi-circle. Heinig and Stillwell say this kills shyness and helps interpretation (Heinig & Stillwell, 1981, p. 4). Students see each other, so they react to faces, not just voices.

Rhythm came from clapping, stamping, and table drums. McGregor et al say drama with rhythm creates “enormous enjoyment and commitment”. The beat kept time for lines. It also kept attention. When the beat changes, the ear wakes up.

Pantomime was used: Tunde stood tall when he chose; Taiwo bowed his head in regret. Symbols were simple: the left side of the room = one road, the right side = the other. This made abstract concrete. Siks says drama helps children explore real experiences (Siks, 1977, p. 11). Walking to a side is a real experience.

3. Testing: 15-Minute Class Test

Questions:

1. Write three themes of the poem and elaborate with quotations.
2. Write two styles of the poet with examples.

The class teacher marked the test and an average of 60% was scored by the students. They passed because they lived the poem. They didn’t cram. They remembered Segun’s walk, the chorus’s chant, the drum beat. Siks says drama stirs emotions through the senses, and emotion helps memory (Siks, 1977, p. 11).

4. Discussion: Branching Questions

We asked: “Which traveler made a better choice?” “Life is simple. Justify.” “Who wants to end up like Taiwo?” Students answered fast. No one slept. Pemberton-Billing and Clegg say evaluation sharpens ideas (Pemberton-Billing & Clegg, 1965, p. 17). The talk after the drama fixed the learning. Students connected the poem to their lives: school, house, and choices.

Result

1. **No sleeping:** With drums and a chorus, students were busy. Adeyemo says activity methods stop wandering minds (Adeyemo, 1976, p. 44).
2. **Shy students spoke:** The group covered them. Confidence grew. Slade says drama gives “confidence, and ability to observe, tolerate and consider others” (Slade, 1980, p. 105).



3. Easy recall: Students quoted without books. Body memory + emotion = strong memory.

4. Joy: Class ended dancing. Siks says learning must be enjoyable (Siks, 1977, p. 11). Joy brings students back next time.

Many students run away from literature and the enrollment for WAEC was dropping as they regarded poetry as an abstract subject. The perception changed after the drama lesson; they saw poetry as a story and a choice. The method gave them “freedom to interact and participate”, which was our goal. We used tables, hands, voices, and a known song. Inegbe says theatre is practical for education (Inegbe, 2003, p. 82). We prove it’s practical even with no budget.

Discussion

Why does beating a table help students understand Robert Frost? The body learns. When students clap “Choices we make in life matter”, the words enter through the ear, the hands, and the chest. Siks says drama involves the whole person (Siks, 1977, p. 4). Whole-person learning sticks. Normal teaching uses eyes and ears only. Read and listen. That’s two senses. Drama uses eyes, ears, hands, feet, voice, and heart. Six senses beat two. That’s why 60% happened.

Voluntary vs. Involuntary Attention

Adeyemo says there are two kinds of attention. Voluntary work is hard. “He strives to pay attention”. Involuntary is easy “responding to stimuli that require no conscious effort” (Adeyemo, 1976, p. 44). A drumbeat is involuntary. You hear it, you move. We used drumbeats to pull students in. Once in, we gave them the poem. They didn’t notice they were learning. Slade calls this the child’s way of working (Slade, 1980, p. 105). We didn’t fight the child. We used the child’s way.

Monotony Kills, Variety Saves

Adeyemo’s first rule: change your method to avoid monotony (Adeyemo, 1976, p. 44). Talk-talk-talk for 40 minutes is monotony. Talk-sing-act-clap-answer is a variety. The brain loves new things. Each change refreshes attention. Our three scenes, song, and discussion were five changes in 40 minutes. No time to sleep.

Low-Cost, High-Impact

Nigerian schools often say “no money for drama”. Our answer: You don’t need money. You need a method. A semi-circle is free. Clapping is free. Tables are already there. Local songs are free. Siks says drama must be “thoughtfully planned, structured and guided”, not expensive (Siks, 1977, p. 11). The expense is in the teacher’s planning, not the school’s purse.



Inclusion

Process-concept of drama “takes care of the group’s multifarious composition” (Siks, 1977, p. 4). In Eleyo High School, some students can’t read well. In the chorus, they still sang. Some are shy. In the semi-circle, they still moved. McCaslin says drama lets children perform at their “highest level” because they accept group decisions (McCaslin, 1987, p. 16). The group carried each child.

Evaluation through Talk

Pemberton-Billing and Clegg say expression leads to evaluation, and evaluation sharpens ideas (Pemberton-Billing & Clegg, 1965, p. 17). Our branching questions were evaluated. “Which traveler made a better choice?” made students judge. “Life is simple. Justify.” made them think. This is higher-order thinking, not just recall. Drama led them there.

Teacher’s New Role

The teacher stopped being a lecturer and became a guide. Siks says the teacher explores “along with the player” (Siks, 1977, p. 4). Our teacher picked the song, set up the semi-circle, and asked questions. That’s guiding. Inegbe says societies that ignore theatre will have “sterile” educational growth (Inegbe, 2003, p. 82). Teachers who ignore drama will have sterile classes. If poetry can be drummed, so can history. Date = drumbeat. If math can be chanted, formulas stick. Siks says drama helps children explore “other subject areas” (Siks, 1977, p. 11). Start with literature, then spread. Students came to school to learn. When teaching is boring, they leave in mind even if body stays. Drama brings the mind back. It turns the classroom from a sleeping room to a doing room. And when students do, they learn. The 60% average is proof. The smiles are more proof.

Conclusion

Poetry is dead on the page. It lives in the mouth, the feet, and the heart. At Eleyo High School, Ikere, “The Road Not Taken” was dead for years. Students skipped it, slept through it, and failed it. We brought it to life with no stage and no costumes. We used what every class has: children, voices, hands, tables, and a teacher willing to change. The process-concept structural approach of Geraldine Siks gave us the map, plan for perception, response, imagination, improvisation, communication, and evaluation. Make sure every child has a job. Guide, don’t lecture. Use the body, not just the head. We did that. The result was 60% average and a room full of awake, talking, thinking students.

Adeyemo S.P.O says teachers must change methods, use dramatization, and let students “do, see, and act”. We did that. McCaslin says drama lets children work at their highest level because they take responsibility and cooperate. We saw that: shy students joined the chorus, loud students led songs, and everyone helped. Peter Slade says drama is not idleness but the child’s way of thinking and learning. Our class proved it. This study answers the problem we started with. Students were leaving literature because poetry was



abstract and teaching was not participatory. Drama fixed both. It made the abstract concrete; two sides of the room became two roads. It made the class participatory; every student had a role. Literature became interesting, attractive, and enjoyable.

For teachers, the message is clear. Change your method. Avoid monotony. Use dramatization, pictures, and actions. Let students do, see, and act. You don't need money. You need a semi-circle, a song, and a willingness to guide, not just talk. Siks says drama must be "thoughtfully planned, structured and guided" (Siks, 1977, p. 11). Do that, and the class will follow.

For students, drama gives you power. Self-discipline, control, imagination, teamwork, artistic awareness, and self-expression; these are not just for actors. They are for life. When you act out a poem, you practice life choices. You learn that choices matter, as the chorus said. You learn to be careful, as Tunde warned. You learn that taking the road "less traveled by" can make "all the difference", as Segun showed.

Finally, this research agrees with Winifred Ward, quoted by Siks: "drama comes in the door of the school with every child" (Siks, 1977, p. 3). Teachers should grab it. Don't let it stay outside. Bring it in, and the child will come alive. When the child is alive, poetry is alive. When poetry is alive, education is alive. And when education is alive, the society grows.

Recommendations

So, we recommend drama, not as a show, but as a way; a way to teach, a way to learn, a way to enjoy. Try it, next poetry class. Pick a poem, make a chorus, sing a song, and watch the sleeping heads rise. The road to understanding poetry is not taken by reading alone. It is taken by doing. And that has made all the difference.

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