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Teaching Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*

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Abstract:

In her *The Dispossessed*, Ursula K. Le Guin introduces two dialectical planets in a circular form and non-linear structure. In addition, she manages to refer to and criticize our planet in her novel. And teaching such a text may cause a lot of troubles for teachers of science fiction. Hence, a lesson plan is made to help in and encourage teaching this text.

Key Words: Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, teaching science fiction

Introduction:

This lesson plan is intended for English Literature undergraduate students who study English as a foreign language. It includes a detailed description of what will happen in a class; stating objectives, materials needed, activities, procedures, conclusion, and assessment (evaluation). This plan is intended to help the teacher to be organized and prepared for teaching Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*. However, this plan may be adjusted in class in order to meet the needs of specific students enrolled in a science fiction course like this and/or to accommodate class progress.

Objectives:

After reading Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, students will show a general understanding of this novel by participating in the class discussion, answering questions, and writing reports. They will become familiar with how to apply some science fiction terms to the novel, such as novum, utopia, ecocriticism, terraforming, and other related terms. There will be some emphasis on utopia, capitalism, socialism, anarchism, feminism, the parent-children relationship, and male-female relationships. Also, this course will address the novel's context and how it critiques our social shortcomings.

Materials:

Students should read at least two chapters for each session from Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*; it depends on the length of the chapters in question. They should bring the text with them for they need it to refer to and/or quote from. Some additional notes might be distributed, usually to address elements and points that require more attention from the students. These notes tend to reflect ideas related to the novel such as colonization, family, ecology, etc. In addition, some optional articles could be put on reserve; such as Neil Easterbrook's "State, Heterotopia: The Political Imagination in Heinlein, Le Guin, and Delany", Bernard Selinger's "*The Dispossessed*: The Artist and Politics", George A. Trey's "Agonal Politics in Space and Time: Arendt and Le Guin on World Creation" and Victor

Urbanowicz's "Personal and Political in The Dispossessed."

Participation:

Students' participation is imperative. In this plan, the students are at the center of learning. This means that the ideas they raise are developed and answered through discussion that will take place in the class. They are encouraged to express their opinions and interests and to ask questions. Giving them a chance to ask and trying to answer their questions will instigate their curiosity to explore the text. Though the text is chosen and assigned, yet the ideas and discussion in the class will focus on the students' raised issues. They have a chance to hit different points because there are many topics that will meet different tastes, such topics as women and their rights on both planets, the concept of sharing, family, marriage, etc.

Troubles to Overcome:

At the beginning of each class, students will be asked to tell their opinions in the assigned chapters. This does not mean that the students should like the novel; they might like some parts or none at all. The point here is that each student is to tell his/her opinion about the novel in general and about some specific points in particular and why he/she thinks so. The points they raise will be the focus of their instructor's comments. Board will be used in order to help the students connect ideas together.

The students may have trouble seeing Anarres as utopian, in part because it is more ideal than real, and in part because it contradicts their propertarian values. For the second reason, they may have trouble understanding socialism or anarchism. In addition, the non-linear structure may cause some difficulties to some students. But the discussion in the class will help to overcome these problems, and will shed light upon these topics. It is the teacher's turn to comment on these problems.

Activities:

The novel will take at least six 90-minute sessions; each will be devoted for two chapters with the exception of the last class, there will be three chapters. There might be a necessity to add a seventh class for revision and wrapping up. However, each session should be distributed as follows:

1- Warm up (8-10 minutes); 2- Group presentation (15-20 min.); 3-Question/discussion (35-40 min.);4-Group discussion (15 min.); 5- Conclusion (8-10 min.).

Methods/Procedures:

This lesson plan consists of different teaching techniques: question/discussion, presentation, group discussion, and a cooperative learning assignment. These varieties of techniques are meant to assure the students' learning and to overcome boredom in the class. Using different techniques and methods will help to create an educational environment.

At the beginning of the first meeting, a brief introduction about science fiction in general and how this genre discusses and critiques different daily topics and presents various possibilities could be helpful. In the following meetings, the instructor may try at the beginning of each session to remind the students of what they have discussed in the previous

meeting. This helps to connect the text as a whole unit. The introduction will take between 8-10 minutes.

Then, a group of 3-5 students is to present each chapter to the whole class. This group can use written notes or/and writing on the board besides speech. Each member is to present an idea or a character or anything related to the assigned chapters and speaks about it to the class. This presentation is intended to give the students hints for discussion, and to let those who present a chance to express their interests and opinions. Each session will include at least two group presentations. Each presentation lasts 8-10 minutes. Time might be shorter, depending on the topic addressed and its newness.

After that, discussion will start. In order to create a learning milieu in class, questions might be raised, such as “What do you think of this chapter?” or “What does this chapter reveal to you as a student?” Students should be given a chance to express their opinions, and to talk in front of each other. Also, they may comment on what has been raised in the presentation. This will lead the class to talk about terms like utopia, characters, structure, women, children, and how these relate to each other.

The instructor is to comment on some points in order to instigate their curiosity. Of course, I may pose a question or refer to an incident in order to give them clues to talk about. However, at the beginning my questions will be general such as: What do you think of the chapter? What are the serious problems that this chapter deals with? And how does the novel solve and/or handle these problems? Does it enhance or suggest any possibilities? These questions will lead to more specific concepts such as anarchism, socialism, and capitalism, or any other points they may raise and want to learn about.

Conclusion:

At the end, it is the instructor’s turn to wrap up what has been going on in the class. The focus will be on the main points that the instructor saw his/her students being confused about during discussion, taking into consideration their ideas and interests. This brief wrap-up will take 8-10 minutes.

After each two classes, students might be divided into three-to-four student groups to think of a concept or an idea such as isolation, male-female relationship, exploitation, etc. and apply it to the part of the novel discussed in class so far. It is their choice. They may apply a theory or a philosophical point of view in their reports.

In order to keep them involved outside the class, each group is to bring a three-to-five-page report to the next class. They are to submit this report to me as a part of their evaluation in the course. By the end of this novel, each group is to submit at least three reports. They should provide their colleagues with copies of their reports. The purpose of this assignment is that the students can learn more from each other and can help each other in understanding the text. Each student has to participate in the group discussion because the instructor may ask any group member about a point or an idea in the group’s report. However, each group is to write the names of its members on the top of the report.

Finally, the instructor should ask if students have questions. They are to be reminded of the chapters they have to read for the next class. As mentioned at the beginning, this novel will be divided at least into six parts; two chapters for each session. The technique and method explained above will be applied to all sessions. By the way, this plan might be a model for teaching science fiction novels for students of other cultures studying English literature.

Evaluation:

Evaluation of this lesson plan will be based on class participation in the discussion, students' answers and questions in the class, presentations, and the groups' assigned reports. In class, students will be encouraged to participate and express their interests. Discussion should meet the students' interests and objectives. Their questions are to be answered in the class, and references and articles that may help should be provided.

General Notes:

Notes might be distributed at different times. They are intended to help students overcome the non-linearity that the novel has in its structure. These notes might be in the form of summaries, questions, and list of terms mentioned in the chapters in question.

“True journey is return.”

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