

## And Now For Something Not Completely Different: An Approach to Language Through Literature

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This article claims that L2 learners are often given an experience of literature which is completely different from that intended by the authors and from that which they experience in their L1. They are often asked to study texts rather than to respond to the literature in them and this often leads to a reinforcement of their tendency to read studially in the L2 and to aim for total comprehension. This in turn can lead to an emphasis on low-level linguistic de-coding and to uni-dimensional representation of the texts they are asked to read. It is argued that what we should be doing instead is to encourage learners to establish experiential reading as their norm and sufficient comprehension as their goal and to help them to achieve a multi-dimensional representation of literature which can facilitate language acquisition, stimulate a willingness to read and develop the confidence and competence required for successful extensive reading.

After arguing the case for helping L2 readers to achieve aesthetic responses to literature the article outlines and demonstrates four approaches which can be used to ensure that reading literature is an enjoyable and rewarding experience.

### INTRODUCTION

In a letter to his brother and sister, Charles L. Dodgson describes his teaching methodology (Carroll 1855). He stresses the importance of the tutor being "dignified and at a distance from the pupil" to make sure the pupil is "as much as possible degraded" and he describes a lesson in which the teacher shouts questions via a series of sub-scouts to a pupil who is sitting bewildered in the yard downstairs. Of course, communication is impeded and, for example, the teacher's question, "What is twice three?" is received by the pupil as, "What's a nice fee?"; and his timid answer of, "Half a guinea!" is passed back to the teacher as "Don't be a ninny!". This is obviously a ludicrously exaggerated version of a teaching approach. But is it that different from what often happens in the language through literature classroom in which a dominating expert interrogates diminished learners about literature which they feel to be at a great distance from their lives? The teacher has studied the text and knows the right answers; the learners are reluctant participants in a negative quest for comprehension. The result very often is a failure to engage the learners' minds or to interest them in reading literature.

This interrogative approach to literature is encouraged by the left-brain bias of most educational institutions, which value analytical study and seek to achieve

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