

Teaching Poetry

Thelma Pastoor

"Why do we have to read poetry?" "I hate to study poetry." This is the refrain heard so often from the lips of school children, especially those in the junior high grades.

What is the matter with these children? Possibly the difficulty lies in the poetry rather than the children. Still another possibility exists - maybe the teaching method is ineffective. Undoubtedly it is a combination of all these factors.

Yet, simply because children don't like poetry, the teaching of it should not be abandoned. Poetry affords many definite values to those who truly learn to appreciate it. Perhaps through the understanding of these values, parents and teachers can help acquaint the child with various poems and thus help him to appreciate poetry.

Little children learn to love poetry. Some of the first words they learn to say may well be the lines of nursery rhymes. They seem to respond naturally and instinctively enjoy poetry. Nursery rhymes deal with experiences with which the child is familiar, animals which he likes, and funny situations which appeal to the child's sense of humor.

The ability to create great works of literature is a gift of God, and these products of this ability are His gifts to us. God gave us these gifts because he wanted us to enjoy them and better serve Him through the use of them. How can we appreciate His gifts if every word is read only because it is assigned and every minute's reading is sheer drudgery? It is therefore the duty of the parent and teacher to help the child to make the proper use of these gifts.

There is a wealth of poetry available to the interested reader. Any subject he is studying can be enriched by the reading of poetry dealing with the subject. For the student of American history there are the narrative poems like "Paul Revere" and "Barbara Fritchie." To the elementary teacher who is discussing the changing seasons there is nothing more effective to introduce the Autumn season than the opening lines of George Cooper's "Come Little Leaves":

"Come little leaves' said the wind one day,
Come over the meadow with me and play;
Put on your dresses of red and gold,
For summer is gone and the days grow cold."

Some of the Christian's greatest spiritual experiences have been described by poets. The Psalms of David are just such poems, where the child of God expresses his love for his Heavenly Father. Consider such verses as these:

Psalm 92 –

"It is good to sing Thy praises
And to thank Thee, O Most High,
Showing forth thy lovingkindness
When the morning lights the sky.
It is good when night is falling
Of thy faithfulness to tell,
While with sweet, melodious praises
Songs of adoration swell."

Or Psalm 25 –

“Lord, to me Thy ways make known,
Guide in truth and teach thou me;
Thou my Savior art alone,
All the day I wait for thee.”

Or, in the comforting lines of Psalm 23 –

“In sweet communion, Lord, with Thee
I constantly abide;
My hand thou holdest in thy own
To keep me near thy side.”

We all love these beautiful words of the Psalms. And why do we love them? It is partly because we are familiar with these “Poems” and have learned to love and understand them. Teaching which helps children to appreciate and understand poetry at their own level will result in children who love God’s gift of the art of poetry.

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