Teaching Literature in the Language Classroom

Engage students differently, creatively, imaginatively

“Above all, literature can be helpful in the language learning process because of the personal involvement it fosters in readers... Engaging imaginatively with literature enables learners to shift the focus of their attention beyond the more mechanical aspects of the foreign language system.”

“Literature provides a rich context in which individual lexical or syntactical items are made more memorable. Reading a substantial and contextualized body of text, students gain familiarity with many features of the written language – the formation and function of sentences, the variety of possible structures, the different ways of connecting ideas – which broaden and enrich their own writing skills.”

(Joan Collie and Stephen Slater, Literature in the Language Classroom: A resource book of ideas and activities, 5).
When should we start teaching literature in beginning language classes?

- It is never too early, nor too late.
- Discussions and activities, obviously, need to be targeted to the language level.
- This is only half of the “when” question: how do we fit it in?
  - Dedicated literature x-hours?
  - Structuring grammar or vocabulary exercises using literature.
  - Smaller discussion groups? – current question for me!
What should we teach?

• One text or multiple texts?
  • Multiple texts
    • Allows for greater cultural and linguistic exposure.
    • Multiple genres may appeal to students in different ways.
    • May feel disconnected to students and limits depth.
  • One text
    • May limit exposure to different cultures and linguistic forms within the target language.
    • Allows for more familiarity with the author and context.
    • May generate more comfort with the text.
How can we teach literature?

- Variety is key: My experiences with *Le Menteur*
  - Limited excerpts within the text.
  - Comprehension questions.
  - Grammar questions.
  - Creative questions.
    - What color would this scene be? WHY?
    - How will the act/scene/play end? WHY?
- Creative, Meaning-making activities.
  - Act out a scene using a new adaptation: a new setting/a new set of characters/a new theme.
  - Watch a modern adaptation.
  - Dramatic readings.
  - Visual representations – word clouds, brown bag, mind maps.
- Creative and Analytic Writing
  - students were given a choice between analyzing one of the scenes in the text, and its adaptation on stage; or writing their own adaptation of a scene.
Visual representation activities (thank you Tania!)

Brown Bag Activity: Choose 5 items that represent this character, scene, theme, etc.

![Mind Map Image]
Overall, I think my experiment was successful
Integration was my key to success
  - Using *Le Menteur* in class, out of class, in video form, in text form, in writing, in discussions, in performance all contributed to our success with the text.
  - By the end, the students *cared* about the characters and wanted to see how it would end.
  - What really motivated all of us was seeing the production of David Ives’ *The Liar* → they all loved it!
    - Whenever possible, choosing texts with this type of “authentic reward” at the other end makes all the difference.