

Application of Intertextuality in English Literary Works in Senior High School Students' English Reading

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Abstract

Reading and appreciating literary works plays an important role in high school English quality education, which plays an important role in cultivating students' reading interest and improving students' reading quality. This article explores the application of intertextuality theory in the English reading practices of senior high school students. Preliminary findings indicate that while some students demonstrate a high level of proficiency in identifying overt intertextual references, others struggle to discern more subtle connections between texts. Moreover, students' interpretations of intertextuality often reflect their individual experiences, interests, and prior knowledge, highlighting the subjective nature of literary analysis. However, exposure to intertextuality theory and instructional strategies aimed at fostering intertextual awareness appear to positively influence students' reading comprehension and critical thinking abilities.

Keywords

Intertextuality, literary works, senior high English teaching.

1. Introduction

Reading literary works is an important way to improve students' reading literacy, because reading English literary works can promote their language development, cultivate their comprehensive language ability [1], form the ability to read and appreciate literary works for pleasure [2], and enrich and develop students' emotions, language and culture. So the real problem facing English teachers is how to guide students to read literary works. Around this problem, researchers have carried out various explorations. Among them, studies on the teaching of literary works reading based on intertextuality theory have been carried out in English-speaking countries [3]. Intertextuality, a fundamental concept in literary theory, highlights the interconnectedness of texts and the ways in which they reference, reflect, and influence one another. The research aims to understand how senior high school students engage with intertextuality in their reading of English literary works and the potential implications for their comprehension and critical thinking skills. Intertextuality, a concept originating from literary theory, underscores the interconnectedness of texts and the ways in which they reference, reflect, and influence one another. In the realm of English literature education, understanding intertextuality is paramount for students as it deepens their comprehension and appreciation of literary works. This article explores the application of intertextuality theory in the reading practices of senior high school students as they engage with English literary works. By examining how students recognize, analyze, and interpret intertextual references, this research aims to shed light on the efficacy of intertextuality-based approaches in enhancing students' literary understanding and critical thinking skills.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Intertextuality theory

Intertextuality theory, as elucidated by eminent literary theorists like Julia Kristeva[4] and Harris[5], fundamentally challenges the notion of texts existing in isolation. Instead, it proposes that texts are interconnected within a vast network of cultural and textual references, forming a rich tapestry of meaning. These intertextual relationships can take various forms, including direct allusions to other works, thematic parallels, stylistic influences, and gaps that invite readers to fill in connections between texts.

Direct allusions are explicit references to other texts or cultural artifacts within a literary work. They serve to establish connections between disparate texts, inviting readers to recognize the intertextual dialogue taking place. Thematic echoes occur when similar themes or motifs resonate across different texts, suggesting shared cultural concerns or philosophical underpinnings. Stylistic homages involve the emulation or adaptation of literary techniques or conventions from other works, reflecting an author's engagement with literary tradition.

Intertextual gaps, on the other hand, represent spaces within a text where references to other works are implied but not explicitly stated. These gaps require readers to actively participate in the construction of meaning, drawing upon their knowledge of literary history, cultural context, and intertextual cues to infer connections.

By embracing intertextuality as a guiding framework in literary education, educators can empower students to navigate the intricate layers of meaning embedded within texts. Intertextuality encourages readers to approach literature as a dynamic conversation, where each text contributes to and builds upon a larger cultural discourse. Through close analysis of intertextual references, students can develop critical thinking skills, deepen their understanding of literary texts, and appreciate the ways in which literature reflects and shapes broader cultural narratives.

In essence, intertextuality theory offers a powerful lens through which educators can foster a deeper engagement with literature, encouraging students to explore the myriad connections that exist between texts and to appreciate the richness and complexity of the literary landscape. As proposed by literary scholars such as Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes, texts are not isolated entities but rather are part of a complex web of cultural and textual references. Intertextual relationships manifest through direct allusions, thematic echoes, stylistic homages, and intertextual gaps that invite readers to draw connections between different texts. By embracing intertextuality as a guiding framework, educators can empower students to navigate and decipher the intricate layers of meaning embedded within literary works.

2.2. Intertextuality theory and English literary works reading

Intertextuality theory plays a crucial role in enhancing the reading and interpretation of English literary works. First of all, intertextuality theory encourages readers to identify and interpret allusions within texts. English literary works often reference other texts, whether they are classic literature, historical documents, religious texts, or popular culture. Understanding these allusions enriches readers' comprehension by providing deeper layers of meaning and context. Second, intertextuality theory highlights the recurrence of themes, motifs, and archetypes across different texts. By recognizing these intertextual connections, readers can discern broader patterns and motifs within English literary works. For example, the motif of the hero's journey appears in various forms across different literary traditions, from ancient mythology to contemporary novels. Third, intertextuality theory encourages readers to examine the influence of earlier texts on subsequent works. English literary history is characterized by a continuum of influence, where writers draw inspiration from and respond to the works of their

predecessors. By tracing these intertextual relationships, readers gain insight into the evolution of literary genres, styles, and movements. Forth, intertextuality theory elucidates the role of genre and parody in English literary works. Many texts engage in intertextual play by borrowing conventions from established genres or by subverting them through parody. By recognizing these intertextual strategies, readers can appreciate the author's creative manipulation of literary conventions and expectations. At last, intertextuality theory is particularly relevant in the study of metafiction and postmodern literature. These genres foreground the self-conscious manipulation of intertextual references, blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality. By navigating the intertextual web woven by metafictional and postmodern texts, readers confront questions of authorship, representation, and the nature of storytelling itself.

In essence, intertextuality theory enriches the reading experience of English literary works by fostering a nuanced understanding of textual relationships, influences, and interpretations. By embracing intertextuality as a guiding framework, readers can unlock the multilayered meanings embedded within texts and appreciate the interconnectedness of literature across time, culture, and genre.

3. Implementation

Following is the integration of intertextuality theory into Literature Reading in senior high school English teaching practice -- A case study of Unit 8 Literature Lesson 1 The last leaf of Beijing Normal University. This teaching case focuses on the integration of intertextuality theory into Unit 8, Lesson 1, which explores the short story "The Last Leaf" at Beijing Normal University. By examining how intertextuality theory is applied in teaching and learning activities, this article seeks to elucidate its impact on students' engagement with the text and their ability to make connections across literary works.

3.1. Background information

"*The Last Leaf*," penned by O. Henry, is a poignant narrative that delves into themes of sacrifice, hope, and the power of art. Set against the backdrop of Greenwich Village in New York City, the story follows two struggling artists, Johnsy and Sue, as they grapple with illness and despair. Central to the narrative is the symbolic significance of a single leaf painted on a wall, which serves as a testament to the enduring spirit of life in the face of adversity.

References are cited in the text just by square brackets [1]. (If square brackets are not available, slashes may be used instead, e.g. /2/.)

3.2. Teaching procedure

Step 1: Pre-reading activities: Engaging students in discussions about related texts, artworks, and historical contexts that inform their understanding of the story. Pre-reading activities play a crucial role in preparing students for deeper engagement with a text by providing them with the necessary background knowledge[6], context, and critical thinking skills. The teacher presents students with information about the historical period in which the novel is set. This could include primary sources, photographs, or video clips from the time period. Encourage students to consider how historical events, social norms, and cultural values might influence the characters and plot of the text.

Step 2: Close reading: Encouraging students to analyze the text for intertextual references, such as literary allusions, cultural symbols, and thematic parallels. "Intertextual references" encompass a broad range of literary devices and techniques where a text refers to, borrows from, or interacts with other texts. This encourages students to delve deeper into the layers of meaning within a text, exploring connections to other works, cultures, and ideas.

O. Henry's works often contain allusions to classical literature or historical events. In "The Last Leaf," one can find subtle references to the theme of sacrifice, reminiscent of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, though this is not overtly stated in the text. Exploring such allusions can deepen the understanding of the story's themes of selflessness and hope. The setting of "The Last Leaf" in Greenwich Village, New York, provides a rich backdrop for cultural symbols. The bohemian lifestyle of the artists in the Village is a symbol of freedom and creativity but also of struggle and poverty. Exploring how these symbols interact with the characters and plot can reveal insights into the cultural context of the story. "The Last Leaf" explores themes of friendship, sacrifice, and the power of art. Intertextually, these themes can be compared to other works of literature or art that deal with similar ideas. For example, the self-sacrifice of Behrman to create the illusion of the last leaf mirrors the sacrifices made by artists throughout history for the sake of their craft. Drawing parallels to other texts or artworks can enrich students' understanding of these themes.

By encouraging students to analyze "The Last Leaf" for intertextual references, educators can foster critical thinking skills and a deeper appreciation for the complexities of literature. This approach encourages students to engage with the text on multiple levels, uncovering layers of meaning that might otherwise go unnoticed.

Step 3: Comparative analysis: Prompting students to compare "The Last Leaf" with other works of literature, including poems, short stories, and novels, to identify common themes and motifs. Prompting students to compare "The Last Leaf" with other works of literature can be a rich exercise in exploring common themes and motifs across various genres. Here's a comparative analysis focusing on themes and motifs:

1. Themes:

a. Sacrifice and Redemption: "The Last Leaf" by O. Henry explores themes of sacrifice and redemption through the character of Johnsy, who is saved by Behrman's sacrifice of painting the last leaf. This theme resonates with other literary works like "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry, where characters sacrifice for the well-being of their loved ones.

b. Hope and Resilience: Both "The Last Leaf" and Emily Dickinson's poem "Hope is the thing with feathers" convey the theme of hope and resilience in the face of adversity. While Johnsy battles illness, the sight of the last leaf gives her hope. Similarly, Dickinson's poem personifies hope as a resilient force.

c. Friendship and Loyalty: The friendship between Sue and Johnsy in "The Last Leaf" highlights themes of friendship and loyalty. This theme can be compared to other works like "Of Mice and Men" by John Steinbeck, where the friendship between George and Lennie is central to the narrative.

2. Motifs:

a. Nature Imagery: "The Last Leaf" uses nature imagery, particularly the changing seasons and the last leaf on the vine, as motifs that symbolize life, resilience, and hope. This motif can be compared to poems like Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," where nature imagery reflects deeper themes of solitude and contemplation.

b. Art and Creativity: Behrman's art and his sacrifice in "The Last Leaf" serve as motifs representing creativity and self-expression. This motif can be compared to other works like "The Picture of Dorian Gray" by Oscar Wilde, where art serves as a reflection of the soul and the consequences of moral decay.

c. Illness and Mortality: The theme of illness and mortality in "The Last Leaf" can be compared to other works like John Keats' poem "Ode to a Nightingale," where the fragility of life and the inevitability of death are explored through vivid imagery and symbolism.

By comparing "The Last Leaf" with other works of literature, students can gain a deeper understanding of universal themes and motifs and appreciate how different authors use similar literary devices to convey their messages.

Step 4: Multimedia resources: Supplementing the reading experience with visual aids, audio recordings, and video clips that highlight intertextual connections and enhance students' engagement with the text. Integrating multimedia resources into the reading experience can significantly enhance students' engagement and deepen their understanding of the text, and cater to different learning styles, enhance students' comprehension and retention of the material, and foster a deeper appreciation for the text.

4. Conclusion

The implications of this article suggest that integrating intertextuality theory into the English literature curriculum can enhance students' engagement with literary texts and promote deeper understanding and appreciation of literature. Educators are encouraged to incorporate strategies such as close reading, collaborative discussions, and multimedia analyses to scaffold students' exploration of intertextual connections. Furthermore, professional development opportunities for teachers are essential to support the effective implementation of intertextuality-based approaches in the classroom.

In conclusion, this article underscores the importance of intertextuality theory in English literature education for senior high school students. By embracing intertextuality as a guiding framework, educators can empower students to become discerning readers, thoughtful interpreters, and active participants in the rich tapestry of literary discourse. Continued research and pedagogical innovation in this area have the potential to transform English literary education, fostering a lifelong love of reading and learning among students.

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