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BOOK REVIEW



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Teaching Nineteenth-Century Literature: An Essential Guide for Secondary Teachers, Rachel Fenn & Anna McGlynn. Routledge (2019). 192 pp., ISBN: 978-1-138-47917-3.

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Although it is generally defined as the verbal or written transfer of feelings and thoughts, there is no unanimity on a frame regarding the process, content, method, feature, meaning and importance of literature (Eagleton 1996, Hernadi 1978, Meyer 1997). In his definition of literature, Eagleton says that “literature we are told is vitally engaged with the living situations of men and women, it is concrete rather than abstract, displays life in all its rich variousness” (1996, p. 171). Literature has always been, and will continue to be, one of the universal denominators of human experience through which people may identify and communicate with one another, regardless of their professions, life ambitions, geographical and cultural regions, or personal situations. It enables one to dream, to fictionalize the future through combining the past with the current time. Literature also provides us with insights into the past eras, the origins of our society and our current environment. In a nut shell, literature helps us to appreciate the richness of humanity's inheritance in ethnic and cultural diversity, because, it is a powerful tool for delving into the culture of a specific period, socioeconomic class, or social group.

Considering the above explanations, the curriculum of literature classes in schools come to the fore. A survey, directed by Mary E. Hoeft (2012), reveals that a large percent of students have three common reasons as regards why they do not read the assigned materials they are given by teachers: 1) They have too much to read; 2) Their work schedule does not allow enough time for extensive reading; and 3) Their social life leaves little time for reading. In this respect, the book *Teaching Nineteenth-Century Literature: An Essential Guide for Secondary Teachers* offers teachers an alternative approach to attract students' attention. In addition to providing a theoretical framework, it also provides a slew of useful teaching strategies for teaching novels and poetry from the late 1800s and early 1900s in the secondary classroom. With the goal of supporting and encouraging teachers as they introduce their students to literature from the nineteenth century and with a view to cultivating their interest and enthusiasm, *Teaching Nineteenth-Century Literature* discusses important historic developments, outlines pedagogical approaches to teaching literature, and provides step-by-step instructions on how to use literary materials.

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In addition to a Foreword and an introductory chapter by the authors, the book consists of 7 chapters, and it closes with two appendixes, one bibliography and an index. The first appendix is the unit plan of *Mansfield Park*; the second one is *Mansfield Park* summary sheet. In the introductory chapter the writers present a detailed instruction on how to make use of the book. Underlining that secondary school students can feel intimidated by the complex vocabulary and unfamiliar sentence structures found in nineteenth century English literature, they present some advice to secondary school teachers. They also present a brief explanation of the other chapters. The aim of the book, they say, is to equip the teachers with the knowledge, understanding and resources to ensure that they can teach engaging, inspiring and intellectually stimulating lessons with confidence.

Chapter 1, titled as *The nineteenth century in a nutshell*, begins with a brief nineteenth-century timeline, which starts with French Revolution in 1789, and ends with the death of Queen Victoria in 1901. This chapter subsumes a bunch of subtitles as political reforms-political literature, foreign policy-foreign policy literature, religion-religious literature, science and technology-scientific literature, industry and urbanization- industry and urbanization literature, gender-gender literature, the press-the press literature, class-class literature, and education-education literature. Thus, it provides instructors with an excellent grounding which enables them to understand the context. Having a strong grasp of the key events of the era and the arguments that follow, this chapter allows instructors to detect cultural, historical, and ideological connections in texts with greater ease, and to draw inferences and meaning that they could have missed otherwise.

Chapter 2, *Teaching nineteenth-century fiction at KS4 and KS5*, is a guide to nineteenth-century literature and how to teach it in an interesting and original way, covering Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4, and Key Stage 5. Thanks to a variety of recommended activities and lesson plans, teachers may use this chapter to create a scheme of work that is both exciting for students and straightforward to prepare for the students. The chapter provides an overview of typical elements unique to nineteenth-century novels, as well as suggestions for how instructors may utilize the techniques to assist students comprehend their relevance to the tales they are reading. It begins with suggestions for picking a text and developing a work plan, followed by some general ideas for bringing nineteenth-century novels to life in the classroom. The phrase 'nineteenth-century fiction' refers to a broad range of works. Nevertheless, this chapter provides a glossary of widely used terms and phrases in the literary work being studied, as well as in nineteenth-century fiction in general, and urges students to begin utilizing them in their everyday speech.

Chapter 3, *Teaching nineteenth-century poetry*, deals with how to approach nineteenth-century verse. It demonstrates how instructors can make both teachers and their students like learning. The chapter shows instructors how to use strategies to bring nineteenth-century poetry to life in the classroom and demonstrates how wonderfully pleasurable teaching and learning nineteenth-century poetry can be for students of all ages. It also stresses the significance of the poem's historical and cultural background so that students may explore how and why contemporary arguments may have impacted the poet.

Chapter 4, *Teaching nineteenth-century texts to younger students*, gives recommendations to instructors of literature classes as regards to how to teach long texts to Key Stage 3 students. It suggests that in addition to being free of copyright, all of the nineteenth-century texts may be found online. This chapter highlights that asking students what contextual information they have about nineteenth-century living, such as workhouses, transportation, and social status, may be a fantastic approach to developing their confidence and helping them realize how much knowledge they already have.

Chapter 5, *Tackling long novels*, offers a variety of techniques and ideas to help instructors have the confidence and passion to teach a wider range of literary works. At the very beginning of this

chapter, there is a reflection section in which teachers are asked five questions about their attitudes to long novels. After that, the chapter addresses the notion that instructors will not be able to read the book in class with their pupils in the same manner that they would with a shorter novel. The chapter contains enough recommendations as regards tackling long novels from the nineteenth century. It claims that for several reasons such as the novel, the students, and the time of year, teachers may choose to have their students read the entire novel at once, or they may prefer to break it down into smaller pieces and handle each one in class before students read the next section. It also claims that one of the most important aspects of studying long books is encouraging students to step up and take charge of their own learning rather than depending solely on teachers for the answers.

Chapter 6, *Teaching nineteenth-century non-fiction*, demonstrates how teachers may use nineteenth-century nonfiction resources to teach pupils at all levels of secondary school. At the very beginning of this chapter, the authors answer why to use nineteenth-century non-fiction in the classroom. Using 19th century nonfiction in the classroom in a variety of ways, they argue, can provide context for the teaching of fiction, serves as a foundation for teaching persuasive writing techniques, acts as a springboard for creative writing and drama assignments, functions as a point of comparison when studying contemporary nonfiction, and is a means for developing vocabulary and grammar skills. According to the authors, non-fiction resources are great teaching tools that provide diversity to instructors' lessons and open pupils' eyes to a world that was, in truth, not all that different from their own. They also claim that non-fiction books can greatly assist pupils by familiarizing them with the grammatical conventions of the nineteenth century and by making them less fearful of approaching older texts. The more materials instructors have at their disposal; the more opportunities they will have to incorporate nineteenth-century nonfiction into their teaching.

Chapter 7, *Teaching Resources*, contains excerpts from nineteenth-century fiction and non-fiction literature, organized by subject and accompanied by comments, comprehension questions and lesson suggestions. In addition to reflecting the difficulty level and duration that students may expect when confronting unknown texts in public examinations, these excerpts have been selected with care to be of interest to secondary-aged pupils. The authors propound that these excerpts can be used for a variety of purposes, including exam practice for previously unpublished texts, as a supplement to lessons on nineteenth-century fiction to give students a broader context, as part of thematic units on media or specific fictional genres to expose students to nineteenth-century language, or as the basis for creative writing activities.

To conclude, all chapters discuss how to overcome the genre's unique problems, such as unwieldy storylines, sophisticated terminology, and foreign sentence patterns, and show how material related to an older age may be made entirely accessible to even the youngest students. Teachers will be able to quickly and simply create an engaging and useful scheme of work for children of various abilities using a variety of comprehensive activities, photocopyable lesson plans, case studies, and excerpts for use in the classroom. The readers will praise the book's writing and organization, noting how it uses a simple format while still providing in-depth discussion of the most important subjects. Students and practitioners alike will benefit from the book's plain writing approach. For secondary school English teachers/students who want to teach/learn nineteenth-century literature, in a way that is both inspirational and intellectually interesting, this practical, accessible work will be a great asset.

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