

# The Use of Poetry Writing in Vocabulary Teaching

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**Abstract:** Vocabulary is an important part of language learning. Some teachers teach vocabulary in a mechanical way and students lack interest in vocabulary learning. Characterized by its brevity, rhyme, and beauty of sound and meaning, poetry is a great teaching resource that teachers should not ignore. This paper explores the application of different types of English poems in vocabulary teaching with specific cases, such as list poems focusing on pronunciation, cinquains and adverb poems grasping lexicality, and acrostic perceiving the meaning, in order to gradually improve students' comprehensive language ability.

**Key words:** poetry writing; vocabulary teaching

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## 1. Introduction

*National English Curriculum Standards for Senior High Schools (2017 Edition)* (NECS) recommend that students should strengthen their language sense in different levels of learning activities, transfer their language skills, and eventually internalize words (Ministry of Education, 2018). However, some teachers are still using the traditional model "teacher giving lecture--students reciting--dictation test", which is a mechanical way of teaching vocabulary, and students lack interest in it (Sun & Lu, 2020). So it is worth exploring how teachers can organize different learning activities to stimulate students' motivation and improve their vocabulary learning efficiency. As a treasure of English literature, poetry attracts students' attention with its beautiful rhythm and rich imagery. This paper will focus on how to help students gradually improve their abilities from vocabulary cognition to comprehensive language ability through poetry writing, so as to enhance the effectiveness of vocabulary teaching.

## 2. Literature Review

Poetry belongs to English literature and is characterized by its brevity, rhyme, and beauty of sound and meaning. Poetry is humanistic and instrumental, and often used as reading materials for optional and compulsory courses. The second unit of PEP English for Senior Two students introduces several kinds of common poems, such as list poems, cinquains and adverb poems. Poetry is not as widely used as storytelling, but many scholars have studied its application in English teaching (Gao Xiaojuan, 2021). Zhang Chunxia (2011) first explored the application of cinquains in English teaching and found that poetry can motivate students' interest in learning English and make students experience a sense of achievement. According to Zhang Wenbo (2021), poetry can enrich students' language perception and cultural experience and help develop their key competence. Du Rui (2014) suggests that poetry can be combined with pronunciation teaching

to help students correct pronunciation and improve phonological awareness; it can also be combined with grammar teaching by using implicit teaching to guide students to generalize grammatical structures. Jiang Yanfu (2015), on the other hand, discusses how to create poetry based on reading texts to develop cultural awareness.

However, since most English teachers have limitations in poetry, there are fewer studies on the application of poetry in vocabulary teaching, which urgently needs more attention from English education researchers (Gao Xiaojuan, 2020). Combined with the learning needs of different vocabularies, this paper will choose appropriate types of poetry, and organize diverse teaching activities, so that students can learn the form, meaning and usage of vocabulary in different activities and put vocabulary into use.

### **3. The Use of Poetry Writing in Vocabulary Teaching**

In NECS, learning vocabulary is not only to memorize the pronunciation, forms and meanings of words, but also to be able to understand information and express ideas (Ministry of Education, 2018). In this paper, we will introduce the use of poetry in vocabulary teaching from three aspects, such as pronunciation, lexicality and thematic meaning, and take the "New Starting Point" of Unit 1 from Senior One English Course (New Edition) published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press as an example to carry out deep vocabulary learning and eventually improve students' comprehensive language ability.

#### **3.1 List poems focusing on pronunciation**

Pronunciation is closely related to the spelling of vocabulary, and correct pronunciation can help students memorize words effectively. However, some students do not pay attention to the pronunciation and are even afraid to open their mouths to read words, thus affecting the efficiency of vocabulary learning. At this point, teachers can take advantage of the rhythmic and catchy features of poetry to guide students to pay attention to the pronunciation of vocabulary. The list poems have the characteristics of repetitive sentences, rich meaning, and easy to learn. Teachers can lead students to summarize the pronunciation rules of the vocabulary and then create list poems to experience the beauty of vocabulary (Jiang Yanfu, 2016).

#### **3.2 Cinquains and adverb poetry grasping lexicality**

Lexicality is the basis for vocabulary use. Only on the basis of understanding and mastering lexicality can students accurately comprehend and analyze sentence structure and successfully carry out reading comprehension, oral expression and writing activities. At present, teachers generally realize the importance of lexicality and guide students to pay attention to lexicality. Some students tend to memorize lexicality by rote, which is not effective. Therefore, lexical learning needs to happen in meaningful learning contexts.

Cinquains and adverb poems are very helpful in guiding students to focus on lexicality. Cinquains are simple and witty in style. Cinquains consists of five lines, of which the first line is a noun representing the subject of the poem; the second line is two adjectives describing the subject; the third line is three verb-ing describing the action; the fourth line is four words expressing the author's opinion or feeling about it; and the fifth line is a word echoing the first line. Thus, the cinquain is suitable for characterizing a particular person or thing.

The adverb poem is a type of list poem. It is free verse poetry that begins with an adverb and is flexible in structure and form. Creating an adverb poem not only helps students grasp the main idea of a text and appreciate its emotional changes, but also reinforces the vocabulary they have learned and improves their language skills.

#### **3.3 Acrostic perceiving the meaning**

Meaning is the soul of the vocabulary, and the pronunciation and spelling of words are the forms that carry meaning. Therefore, guiding students to accurately grasp the meaning of words is the key of vocabulary teaching. Students should

learn the meaning of words in real language situations. Judging whether a student has really grasped the meaning of a word cannot be done only by dictation. To make students use words accurately and appropriately in the language activities of listening, speaking, reading, viewing and writing, it is a good choice to create acrostic.

Acrostic is theme-centered. The first letters of each line are linked together to form the topic word, which is similar to the Chinese hidden-head poem. Because it focuses on highlighting the meaning of the theme, it is very effective in helping students grasp the thematic meaning of the word.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Teachers, as designers, organizers and instructors of classroom teaching, should change the traditional vocabulary teaching methods and organize teaching activities at different levels to stimulate students' interest in vocabulary learning and enhance learning efficiency. Poetry is an important teaching resource which cannot be ignored. Most of the poetry is musical, and has rich meanings. List poems can help students focus on pronunciation and learn to rhyme; cinquains and adverb poetry guides students to pay attention to lexical changes and master correct usage; and acrostic is based on thematic meaning, which enables students to perceive, comprehend, and use vocabulary in thematic meaning. Therefore, poetry writing not only reinforces vocabulary learning and helps students develop a sense of language, but also encourages students to express their inner feelings and ideas in English from their own life experiences and interests, and do things in English, and finally achieve the development of language and thinking.

#### **Conflicts of Interest**

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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