

# A Preliminary Exploration of Teaching Appreciation of Classical Literary Masterpieces to Middle School Students——Using "Lin Daiyu Enters the Rongguo Mansion" as an Example

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**Abstract:** Ye Shengtao once said, "Reading is absorption, writing is expression." Absorption and reading have a causal relationship. One dimension explicitly stated in the core literacy of Chinese language is "cultural inheritance and understanding." Reading is an important opportunity for middle school students to absorb traditional Chinese literature. Integrating reading into classroom practice, embedding it into teaching tasks, and establishing a practical framework are of great significance for middle school students to construct their own reading experience and explore pathways to reading.

**Keywords:** reading, emotion, teaching methods

## 1. Introduction

The appreciation of classical masterpieces should organically combine humanistic education with knowledge transmission, allowing students to achieve efficient and high-quality reading outcomes, and, based on this, develop their reading and writing abilities. For middle school students, compared to reading entire classical literary works, the appreciation of selected masterpieces offers greater feasibility and operability. Regarding how to implement reasonable and effective classical literary masterpiece appreciation and reading teaching in middle school Chinese language classrooms, this paper will elaborate from three aspects: first, a brief analysis of the problems existing in middle school students' reading; second, discussing reading from a three-dimensional perspective.

## 2. Problems in Middle School Students' Reading

### 2.1 Low Reading Efficiency, Superficial Reading

The types of books students read also exhibit "stages." Most middle school students prefer online novels. Firstly, middle school students are in a period of youthful ignorance with a strong curiosity about the world; novels can fulfill desires unrealizable in reality to some extent. Secondly, heavy academic workloads cause high mental tension for middle school students; novels provide a means for mental relaxation and stress relief. This is also why students are easily addicted to novels but show general interest in books containing vast social knowledge, such as literature, history, and popular science. With the prosperous development of the internet, middle school students tend towards online reading for extracurricular activities. The diversity of online books and the uncontrollability of reading choices lead to randomness and disorderliness when middle school students select reading materials. Without systematically choosing books and absorbing their nutrients, reading efficiency remains low. Some middle school students have formed the habit of cursory reading,

engaging only in surface-level reading without delving into the "soul" within the text, failing to cultivate habits of in-depth research and discussion. This reading habit prevents students from establishing an intellectual blend with the book itself, resulting in a "rough" reading process<sup>[1]</sup>.

## **2.2 Lack of Initiative in Reading, Utility Not Evident**

Students lack initiative in reading and show little interest in reading materials, especially classical literature, which they tend to avoid. Some middle school students read primarily to cope with exams or complete reading tasks assigned by teachers. Even when reading voluntarily, it is often for entertainment rather than learning. Students are unclear about their reading purposes, lacking planning and preparation, which leads most middle school students to select materials blindly and without method when reading. Consequently, "blind" reading has become a common phenomenon among middle school students, failing to build a bridge between reading and practice. The knowledge acquired through reading enters the mind but is not applied to life. Reading is one method of establishing an organic connection with the world. During the reading process, middle school students should not only broaden their horizons and knowledge but also internalize reading knowledge as motivation, providing more "convenience" for their courses, and applying the "knowledge reserve" gained from reading within the classroom. Purely recreational reading or reading driven solely by interest, without effective guidance, ultimately makes it difficult to refine suitable reading methods and construct a knowledge framework<sup>[2]</sup>.

## **2.3 Limited Reading Conditions, Lack of Independent Thinking**

Among the factors affecting student reading, insufficient time allocation for reading and personal factors are the most prominent. The proportion of students who actively contemplate reading issues in class is also not high. Thus, it can be seen to a certain extent that some students view reading as merely completing a learning task, without engaging in active thinking and analysis. When reading, they easily overlook the overall context and connotative depth of the book, only superficially acquiring fragmented knowledge, making it difficult to cultivate their character.

## **3 . Perceiving the Masterpiece Holistically, Effectively Analyzing the Text**

### **3.1 Clarifying the Text's Structure, Analyzing Character Traits**

Dream of the Red Chamber, as a masterpiece of ancient Chinese literature, contains boundless cultural essence and artistic accomplishment. It particularly vividly portrays the intricacies of a great aristocratic family through every word, deed, and action. Lin Daiyu, the foremost of the Jinling Twelve Beauties, is admired by later generations for her exceptional grace and talent. Yet, she dies of grief on the wedding night of Jia Baoyu and Xue Baochai, her life ending bleakly. Is all this foreshadowed from her first entry into the Rongguo Mansion?

Unwilling to abandon her father but having to go to her grandmother, Lin Daiyu's reluctance is palpable. However, Lin Ruhai insists on sending her to the Jia family of the Rongguo Mansion. Firstly, Lin Ruhai knows his health is declining and worries about his ability to raise her; the Lin family has few descendants and no siblings to support each other. Secondly, Grandmother Jia held Jia Min in high esteem and wished to have her only daughter's child by her side for care. Thus, at merely ten years old, Lin Daiyu begins a life of dependence. Despite her noble status and her grandmother's doting, within the clan genealogy, she is still an outsider. This chapter writes that upon arriving in the capital, fearing others might laugh at her, she is "circumspect in every step, careful in every action, unwilling to speak or move rashly," showing she is extremely observant and has strong self-esteem. Facing the affectionate Grandmother Jia, she embraces her and cries, revealing her true feelings, which also writes out Lin Daiyu's vulnerable side; she is just a ten-year-old child needing the protection of elders. When her aunts inquire about her health, she is frank about her illness, openly telling the monk's "unconventional talk," reflecting her candid nature and trust in her grandmother's family.

Wang Xifeng, as the daughter-in-law of a prominent family, navigates clan interactions skillfully and dexterously. The phrase "she arrives before her voice is heard" used by the world to describe Sister Feng is indeed apt. In this chapter, her entrance is preceded by her laughter coming from the backyard. Lin Daiyu's internal monologue asks, "Who is this so uninhibited and ill-mannered?" This indicates that Wang Xifeng's behavior is quite rare within the clan, yet she thrives. Why is that? Grandmother Jia jokingly introduces her personally, further showing her fondness and tolerance for Wang Xifeng. At first glance upon seeing Daiyu, Wang Xifeng compliments two families and five people with one sentence,

demonstrating high linguistic skill and emotional intelligence. Praising Lin Daiyu's beauty and demeanor as resembling a true granddaughter compliments both Grandmother Jia and her three granddaughters. Softly expressing sorrow over Jia Min's early death, sharing Grandmother Jia's grief, wins further favor from the matriarch. Later, she even mentions having prepared the fabric for Lin Daiyu's clothes in advance, showing such thoroughness and consideration that it also wins Daiyu's favor.

### **3.2 Understanding Customs and Etiquette, Appreciating Human Relationships and Social Norms**

Upon Daiyu's entry into the Jia mansion, her uncles do not appear. Jia She and Jia Zheng, being Daiyu's maternal uncles, why do they not show up? Is it disdain or difficulty towards Lin Daiyu? I believe not; it likely involves customs and etiquette. In ancient times, the status of a maternal uncle was significant, bearing responsibility for upbringing. However, a niece, after all, is not a direct lineal descendant but a relative from another surname, and distinctions between genders were observed among adult relatives. The words spoken by Uncle Jia She certainly contain elements of excuse, but for a man over fifty, indulgent in wine, women, and wealth, to patiently have a message relayed, including detailed and considerate commonplace remarks, can be considered proper yet humane. His statement, "I haven't been well these past few days, and meeting the young lady would only upset us both, so I temporarily cannot bear to meet," very likely reflects his genuine physical condition and feelings, showing no indication that Jia She dislikes his niece. Jia Zheng says he is abstaining from certain foods and has not returned. Later text mentions Baoyu going to the temple to fulfill a vow, which corresponds with Jia Zheng's abstention, suggesting it is not intentional. Thus, through meticulous and profound characterization, the customs and etiquette of the time are also revealed.

Daiyu's first meal at the Jia mansion contains deep cultural and the protocols of a feudal aristocratic family. When the evening meal begins, a maid announces, "The Old Ancestress has called for the evening meal." Lady Wang hurriedly takes Lin Daiyu over. The word "hurriedly" reflects respect for Lady Jia and the rule of serving the mother-in-law at meals. Lady Wang, as a lady of rank, could serve her elder but does not dare neglect, embodying the ritualistic habits of a great feudal family. The ladies serve the meal. Only after Lady Jia is seated do the other young ladies sit down in order, demonstrating seniority and order. After eating, a young maid presents tea with a side dish tray. After receiving the tea, someone else brings a rinsing bowl. Lin Daiyu, observing others, follows suit and realizes it's not for drinking but for rinsing her mouth first! Thus, after rinsing her mouth and washing her hands, the attendants present the tea for drinking. This not only shows Lin Daiyu's exceptional attentiveness but also reveals the rules of a prosperous, bell-and-cauldron family steeped in poetry, literature, and ritual.

## **4. Analysis of Reading Value, Clarifying Reading Positioning**

### **4.1 Value Analysis at the "Knowledge" and "Skills" Level**

Engaging in classical literature reading can help middle school students effectively master basic Chinese language knowledge, language skills, and improve their Chinese language literacy. In the teaching of "selected texts" as set pieces within the curriculum, teachers have basically imparted the various language skills and knowledge required by students. However, students' understanding of this knowledge is often only through the selected text examples; their grasp of various literary skills remains somewhat distant, and their understanding of traditional Chinese culture tends to be slightly one-sided and disconnected. Therefore, effective consolidation through extensive reading is still needed. Conducting classical literature reading serves, firstly, to consolidate the absorption of in-class language knowledge, guiding students to more deeply "memorize," "master," and "understand." Secondly, it focuses students' thinking on the text, returning to the text, enabling them to learn and master the characteristics of the entire book's text in terms of structure, expression, etc., systematically. In the process, they think, compare, and explore, continuously improving their appreciation and analytical abilities. Thirdly, it helps enhance students' expressive and application abilities<sup>[3]</sup>.

### **4.2 Value Analysis at the "Process" and "Method" Level**

The new curriculum standards require students to read various literary genres such as treatises, news, novels, essays, and poetry, and to have a clear understanding and mastery of them. Whole-book reading aligns with the requirements of

the new curriculum standards and students' growth needs. Our channels and methods for selecting books should also be diversified. The process and methods of reading are not merely "seeing the words"; they can involve recitation, debate, presentation, etc., revolving around classic arguments in the text to ensure students' comprehensive growth in reading ability. Reading should encourage students to communicate, allowing them to present their respective reading situations, thereby uncovering and mastering their book reading progress through reading. Therefore, when reading, multiple reading methods should be combined, integrating "listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking."

#### **4.3 Analysis at the "Emotional Attitude" and "Values" Level**

The national character, epochal nature, and artistry contained in classical literature are what we need to grasp when conducting reading. The rigorous artistic structure, lifelike characterization, and authentic portrayal of generational changes in Dream of the Red Chamber resonate with us. The epochal nature it contains is something that needs to be guided for students to learn. In reading, we should integrate imagination with personal experience, using a "transferable" approach to complete the edification of students' emotional attitudes and values education. "Whole-book" reading can also better guide students to experience the rich humanistic spirit of Chinese culture and construct their own holistic life outlook.

### **5. Classroom Teaching Strategies for Masterpiece Reading**

#### **5.1 "Questions" as the Path in the Mountain of Books**

Use questions as a guide to construct the framework of textual knowledge. In the current environment dominated by exam-oriented education, many school teachers require students to be thoroughly familiar with every potential question from the entire text. Furthermore, the traditional textbook view, treating textbooks as infallible dogma, repeatedly suppresses students' right to express their own opinions. Textbooks are reading materials meticulously selected by experts, the essence of reading materials. Therefore, only by ensuring students thoroughly understand the textbook can the goals of Chinese language teaching be solidly achieved. We should maintain the right to selective learning in text teaching, using questions as a guide to gradually dig deeper into the knowledge points of the article, constructing students' unique reading insights and abilities. This is also a new requirement under the environment of the new curriculum reform. "Immersion-style" teaching virtually provides a platform and atmosphere for student learning.

#### **5.2 "Emotion" as the Path in the Mountain of Books**

Use emotion as a guide to evoke students' "empathy ability." Teachers should actively "intervene" in students' in-class article learning, guiding their emotional perspectives. However, many teachers fail to handle the relationship properly when managing students' emotional perspectives on reading texts. Either they pay no attention to the concepts students form while reading, focusing only on completing teaching tasks and learning vocabulary for exams, laissez-faire; or they strictly plan and manage the establishment of students' viewpoints, for example, imposing their own views when students learn a text, requiring students to understand the article only according to the teacher's perspective. Such teaching greatly reduces students' reading ability, which is a very notable issue today. The integration of emotion, "moistening things silently," is extremely important in Chinese language learning.

#### **5.3 "Structure/Summary" as the Path in the Mountain of Books**

Teachers need to change their own teaching concepts, attach importance to the teaching of masterpiece reading, and incorporate it into their teaching plans, standardizing masterpiece reading teaching. First, incorporate masterpiece reading activities into the Chinese language teaching plan for each semester. Second, ensure time for masterpiece reading, guaranteeing that students' reading activities can proceed orderly. Teachers can design weekly reading schedules, monthly reading schedules, formulate reading plans by chapters, then supervise students to complete the corresponding reading tasks. Subsequently, check reading outcomes through forms like reading notes or reading reflection exchange meetings. Alternatively, teachers can assign one or several thought questions based on the book's content, allowing students to search for answers in the book with these questions, to avoid students "forgetting after reading." Summarize and condense knowledge points to reinforce their learning. Systematically summarize the learned content as a knowledge reserve and

tool for the next learning stage; this is the meaning of learning. Teachers should utilize their function to guide students in orderly reading.

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