Jane Eyre, an unconventional heroine

Level: Anglès 3

Term: end of the 2nd term

Length: 3 sessions

1: The context

On 8th March we celebrate the International Women's Day. The focus of the celebrations ranges from general celebration of respect, appreciation and love towards women for their economic, political and social achievements. It's a great opportunity to talk about some female writers, such as Charlotte Brontë, whose novels have become classics of English literature. She first published her works (including her best known novel, Jane Eyre) under the penname Currer Bell. We are going to read a short fragment of Jane Eyre, work some grammar contents related to the level (Anglès 3), and realise and think about the fact that authoresses had (even have) to change their names if they wanted their works to be published. As a final task students will have to write a short text for the back cover of Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, telling readers some facts and their opinion about its authoress, using some adjectives to describe her as well as her career, and trying not to use discriminatory language.

2: Objectives, contents and assessment criteria

a. Objectives:

• Teaching objectives:
  • To introduce Charlotte Brontë and one of her most famous characters, Jane Eyre.
  • To offer the students opportunities to reflect and form their opinion about the fact that some authoresses couldn’t (or can’t) publish their works using their real names.
  • To offer the students opportunities to apply newly understood concepts

• Learning outcomes: The students will be able to:
  
  • Write a short text (about 50 words) describing a woman’s professional career.
  • Value Literature as a possible source of reflection about gender issues.

b. Subject own competences (as embodied in RESOLUCIÓ de 10 de maig de 2013)

Communicative dimension

Reading:

• Llegir, comprendre i obtenir informació de textos escrits, sobre temes habituals o propers, amb l'ajut del context i del suport visual i icònic.

• Desenvolupar estratègies de comprensió de textos per obtenir informació i interpretar-los.
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Writing:

- Planificar l'escrit d'acord amb la situació comunicativa i a partir de la generació d'idees i la seva organització.

- Escriure textos curts i senzills sobre necessitats personals i situacions de la vida quotidiana seguint les convencions i formats adequats a cada tipus de text, i utilitzant frases senzilles connectades amb elements de cohesió bàsics.

- Utilitzar tècniques i recursos per revisar i millorar el text escrit.

Literary dimension

- Transmetre les percepcions personals que sorgeixen de la lectura de textos literaris, i gaudir-ne.

- Valorar el text literari com a recurs per transmetre emocions, sentiments, realitats i ficcions, tot reconeixent el seu valor estètic.

- Reconèixer algunes obres rellevants de la literatura anglesa.

c. Contents

- Some adjectives ending in –less and –ful

- Language to talk about conditions and its consequences (3rd conditional)

- Sentences and words that come across throughout the lesson.

d. Assessment criteria

Regarding the objectives, we will know whether students have achieved them if at the end of the lesson they are able to:

- Write fully detailed sentences

- Organise the text and discuss the topic properly.

- Make themselves understood as no interpretation on the reader’s part is necessary.

- Use English vocabulary correctly.

- Use English language throughout and use correct word order, verbal forms, spelling and punctuation.

- Avoid using discriminatory language when they acknowledge an authoress’ merits

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3. Activities

Session 1 (2 hours)

0- INTRODUCING the unit (final task, learning targets and assessment criteria, see 4)

1- WARM-UP: The teacher presents a brief summary of Jane Eyre, up to chapter XXIII, and asks the students to do a simple exercise where they have to match some key words from the text they are going to read and their definitions. It can be made in pairs. (WORKSHEET 1)

2- READING COMPREHENSION I: Students read the text. Through some questions and activities (see worksheet 2) the teacher will guide the comprehension of the first part of the text (up to You think wrong!) (Whole group)

3- GRAMMAR: Forming adjectives. Some adjectives ending in –less appear on the text. It’s an opportunity to work adjective formation, adding –less and –ful to nouns. The students have to do the proposed activities on worksheet 3. It can be made in pairs

4: USE OF LANGUAGE: Practising with adjectives. It’s a very simple exercise where the students have to use new technologies. On http://popplet.com/app/#/3605981 they have to look at some pictures of different actress that have played the character of Jane Eyre on films, and leave at least a comment using two adjectives describing one Jane. They can comment on more than one picture if they want. (Individual activity)

Session 2 (2 hours)

1- WARM-UP: The students listen to the text, and realise how comprehension changes when listening to the text read by a native actress. The audio book is on http://www.loudlit.org/audio/jane_eyre/pages/23_13_jane_eyre.htm. (Whole group)

2- READING COMPREHENSION II: Through some questions and activities (see worksheet 4) the teacher will guide the comprehension of the second part of the text. (Whole group)

3- WRITING: the text has been understood, the students do a simple exercise where they have to use new technologies, writing a very short sentence to resume Jane’s speech and posting a tweet with the hashtag #dignity_for_women (individual activity)

4- GRAMMAR: Third conditional. Optional activity, depending on the level of our students, as the third conditional is not a content embodied in the official curriculum. Anyway, if you decide to take the opportunity to introduce this linguistic structure to your students, you should consider the idea of planning some extending activities.

Session 3 (2 hours)

1: WARM-UP: First of all students are asked to read a text (worksheet 5) about women and their social situation during the 19th century, especially female writers, using as an example Charlotte Brontë. Some quotes from her character Jane Eyre will be useful to show how she expresses her legitimate desire for freedom and independence. Finally the text explains how Brontë had to change her name in order to be able to publish her works. However, this can

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also happen nowadays; we have the example of the famous writer J.K. Rowling. (Whole group)

2: WRITING: Completion of the final task: “You work for a publisher. Your boss has told you to write a short text (about 50 words) for the back cover of Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, telling readers about some facts and your opinion about its authoress. Use some adjectives to describe her, as well as her career… Look up on the Internet if necessary, and, above all, try not to use discriminatory language!” (Individual activity)

4. Assessment

Before starting the didactic unit the teacher will share the learning targets and the assessment criteria, and make sure that students understand what the objectives mean. In order to achieve this comprehension, s/he will provide two examples of a description of a writer’s career; one of them will be absolutely brilliant, and the other one will be very poor. Students will review these descriptions against a rubric and decide what needs to be revised for improvement.

This rubric will also be useful for students to revise their own work before they turn it in for a grade. That makes them, and not the teacher, the arbiters of their revisions. It could be advisable to incorporate peer review into the students’ work time as they can make helpful suggestions. (See worksheet Rubric)

5. Class management and methodology

To start with, the teacher should always know what s/he wants from his/her students. S/he has to bear in mind a few objectives, but clear and suitable for the students’ level, and has to share them with the learners, as said above.

On the other hand one should avoid giving ambiguous and vague instructions, and unclear sequencing; intending students to do activities like Read this text and write your opinion without scaffolding might lead students to frustration and failure. Scaffolding means to break up the learning into chunks and then provide a tool, or structure, with each chunk.

As you can see through this lesson, where reading comprehension is key to do some further written tasks, the original text (the novel Jane Eyre) has been shortened, by selecting a significant piece. Students will discuss some key vocabulary; comprehension (including vocabulary and grammar structures) has been worked on the go, chunking the text. Short and simple writing tasks will be asked to be done during this process, and only at the end of the two (maybe three, depending on the length) sessions will they be asked to do the final task, in which students will show what they are able to do. Notice that I use “what they are to be able to do”, not “what they have learnt” or “what they know”. Bearing in mind Bloom’s taxonomy, knowledge is in the lower level: it is key, but we don’t want our students to only “know”; we want them to be able to apply this knowledge creating a written text, in this case a description. However, it’s improbable that they will be able to do it without scaffolding.

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Finally, we will bear in mind the use of ITC through the unit as students have to use Twitter and Popplet in order to publish some simple written tasks and share them with their peers.

3. Final thought

Not only did British authoresses have to change their name in order to be able to publish their works. In our country female writers such as Cecilia Böhl de Faber or Caterina Albert published their works using a male pseudonym: Ferrán Caballero and Víctor Català, respectively. This fact might encourage a discussion on gender issues in Literature. Some questions can come out in a Literature lesson of GES: Are there more authors than authoresses? Why? Are men supposed to write better than women? Was it difficult for a woman to become a novelist, a poet, a playwright? Why? These questions might be useful to introduce some not-well-known authoresses to students from medieval times until today: Isabel de Villena, Florencia del Pinar, María de Zayas, Teresa León, Alfonsina Storni…It is desirable to make the contribution of many women to Literature visible and recognize the work that they did, and this unit can be a good starting point.

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