

## SUGGESTIONS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND CREATIVE WRITING METHOD THROUGH LITERARY WORKS IN ELT /AND NOTES ON CREATING A BOOK PROJECT

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### ABSTRACT

*An interactive program that pays attention to critical thinking, interpretation, discussion and creativity in teaching English language is mostly observed to be ignored in the programs of prep schools or English language courses. This may be simply because, the main objective is to teach students grammatical rules by the help of prototype written works only, in a limited time. Therefore; most of the time, books and their methods used in teaching English keep limited attitudes in teaching the critical thinking. In line with these facts, the main purpose of this study is to make a suggestion for a model on how to use literary works in teaching English more effectively to open a way to more creative classroom activities enriching critical thinking of the students and letting them see different viewpoints as well as improving their abstracting capacity. Apart from that, an alternative book project that contains both language teaching and critical thinking at the same time will be discussed.*

*Key Words: Literary Texts, Critical Thinking, Creative Writing.*

### ÖZET

*Yabancı dil eğitiminde düşünme, yorumlama, tartışma ve yaratıcılığa ağırlık veren katılımcı bir ders programının oluşturulması genellikle ikincil öneme sahip görünmektedir, çünkü ana hedefler çoğu zaman öğrencinin dilbilgisi kalıplarını öğrenmesi ve bu kalıpların prototip metinlerle pekiştirilmesi üzerine odaklanmaktadır. Bu bağlamda yabancı dil öğretimine yönelik kitaplarda kullanılan metinlerin ya da içeriklerinde sunulan yöntemlerin öğrenciye farklı bir bakış açısı kazandırma, eleştirel*

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*düşünme pratiklerini tanıtmaya ve düşünme eğitimi verme açısından gözardı ettiği ya da yetersiz kaldığı noktaların olduğu söylenebilir.*

*Buradan hareketle, yazınsal metinlerin İngilizce dil öğretiminde nasıl kullanılabileceği ve düşünme eğitimi olarak adlandırılan yöntemin ne olduğu bu çalışmada açıklanmaya çalışılmaktadır ve öneri niteliğinde bir ders modeli sunulmaktadır. Etkin bir düşünme, yaratma, uygulama sürecini kapsayan ve yaratıcı yazma çalışmalarını birleştirebilecek model önerisinde, öğrencilerin İngilizce dil kullanımlarını geliştirmenin yanı sıra, metin çözümü, yorumlama, tartışma yoluyla soyutlama yeteneklerinin gelişmesi ve eleştirel düşünmeyi öğrenmeleri amaçlanmaktadır. Bunun yanında, bu yazı içinde dil öğretimi ve düşünme eğitimi birleştiren bir kitap için proje üretmeye yönelik öneriler de yer almaktadır.*

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Yazınsal Metinler, Eleştirel Düşünme, Yaratıcı Yazma.

An interactive program that pays attention to critical thinking, interpretation, discussion and creativity in teaching English language is mostly observed to be ignored in the programs of prep schools or English language courses. This may be simply because, the main objective is to teach students grammatical rules by the help of prototype written works only, in a limited time. Therefore; most of the time, books and their methods used in teaching English keep limited attitudes in teaching the critical thinking.

In line with these facts, the main purpose of this study is to make a suggestion for a model on how to use literary works in teaching English more effectively to open a way to more creative classroom activities enriching critical thinking of the students and letting them see different viewpoints as well as improving their abstracting capacity. Apart from that, an alternative book project that contains both language teaching and critical thinking at the same time will be discussed.

It is clear enough that in English language teaching using various literary works from the literary world would definitely make students improve their English language skills as well as cultivating their textual analysis, interpretation, and abstraction abilities by discussing the issues they are studying on. Surely, writing ability would also improve by examining literary works through stylistic analysis. With a program of creative writing related to this

spacing would certainly help students to create their own viewpoints, as well as improve their ability of interpretation on different points of view about global issues. In a suggested program that includes effective class activities on thinking, reason, reception, creativity and implementation, both the student and the instructor are meant to be in an interactive and cooperative procedure for production. One of the main objectives of the program is to teach students critical thinking and how to produce original ideas using their own personal history and experiences. "Critical Thinking Practice" reminds us to reconstruct what has been internalised and has believed unchangeable in social values of our life styles and make us see it as if we see it for the first time with amazement and try to understand its inner dynamics.

Widespread authoritarian and hierarchic way of thinking creates oppositions by praising and degrading. Approving by the oppositions, this authoritarian and hierarchic thinking style dominates the other and codes an upper belief that is to be believed and not to be changed at all. Becoming individuals who have the power to make decisions of their own is primarily only possible if approached things critically. Trying to understand what is meant by something out of what hasn't been said is very important to show the variations and questionable of life styles. In this case, written texts have the purpose of showing things from different points of views by alienation, metaphor, irony and the like. By analysing written works in fiction-reality relations, students' ability of reception is cultivated. Therefore their abilities of abstraction and associating would also improve. This would give way to students to express their thoughts freely and produce different viewpoints. Apart from that, students would learn to take new things to discover and understand moderately without prejudice. As Terry Eagleton points out: "*All readers are socially and historically positioned and how they interpret literary works will be deeply shaped by this fact.*"(Eagleton, 1983: 83).

What is reception? What kind of a point of view does it give? Reception is a thinking process that attempts to understand and analyse the discourse of the text and its own characteristic language, its own personality, meaning potential, stylistic language, structure, symbols, referring fields, sign system, its discourse. In short, it is the recreation of the written work with the reader and it is a process.

It would be wrong to try to distinguish fiction and fact when literature in question, because a writer in any case starts writing from reality; even if he

copies reality directly or uses metaphor or alienation, literature does not create a world free from human relations and socio-political environment. On the contrary, literature tries to incite readers to criticize the world around them. *“Literary texts are products that reflect different aspects of society. They are cultural documents which offer a deeper understanding of a country or countries.”*(Basnet&Mounfold, 1993). *“Literary discourse estranges or alienates ordinary speech, but in doing so paradoxically, brings us into a fuller, more intimate possessions of experience. Most of the time we breathe in air without being conscious of it; like language, it is the very medium in which we move. But if the air suddenly thickened or infected we are forced to attend to our breathing with new vigilance...we become fresh conscious of how it is constructed at the same time as our engagement with it may be intensified.”*, (Eagleton 1983 p.4) *“Literature would rehearse the masses in the habits of pluralistic thought and feeling, persuading them to acknowledge that more than one viewpoint than theirs existed – namely, that of their masters.”* (Eagleton, 1983: 25)

At prep school, it would be better for students to rehearse more critical thinking practice in order for better preparation for their undergraduate degrees. The very existence of universities is not only to provide students a high academic knowledge, but also to raise generations who can criticize the world around them or who can express their thoughts freely. Surely, we can say prep schools of universities are also accountable for this type of education at an early stage of academic life. This is because we support the idea that English should not only be thought in the frame of grammar rules only; but also should be considered as a way to teach students to be individuals who can judge and learn more at their departments. Teaching strategy affects learning strategy.

In short, using literature in the classroom is a very useful way of achieving the objective above mentioned. First, literature encourages interaction. Literary texts are often rich in multiple layers of meaning and can be effectively mined for discussions and sharing feelings or opinions. Second, literature expands language awareness. Asking learners to examine sophisticated or non-standard examples of language makes them more aware of the norms of language use. Third, literature is authentic material. It is good to expose learners to this source of unmodified language in the classroom improves their language skills. Forth, literature educates the whole person. By examining values in literary texts, teachers encourage learners to develop attitudes towards them. These values and attitudes relate to the world outside the classroom. Finally, literature is motivating. It holds high status in many cultures and countries. For this reason,

students can feel a real sense of achievement at understanding a piece of literature.

### Suggestions on “how to?” and two models

For all the above reasons, working thematically would be useful. Over selected themes, putting certain problems into agenda, and to select didactic texts would serve to meet the suggested thinking practice. In this study, “individual and the society” theme has been selected as general title. Under this title, subtitles such as individual, civilisation, utopia, island are included. For example; for this study two poems have been selected. One of them deals with utopia theme through island imagery. The name of the poem is *The Castaways or Vote For Caliban*. In this poem there are castaways from a plane crash over the ocean reaching an island shore and creating their own “civilisation”. They somehow make division of labour in their small world they have created. In this poem it is seen that people cannot free themselves from the usual routines of life even if they are on a desert island. Castaways have internalised a way of thinking which they believe will lead them to a better life style. In fact what they have made is nothing different from the so-called civilisation indoctrinated in their brains in the modern world. One can easily discuss the basic needs of the castaways in the poem and what they actually have done. The civilisation they have brought to the island has an authoritarian way of thinking, which dominates and controls both nature and human life, and also time. Trying to create a better life is just an illusion. In fact, they turn themselves into machines without emotions working all the time without noticing the beauties of the environment. For instance; they don't care about the beautiful sunset. There is no room for feelings in their lives. They are even ignorant of what is going on around them. They have no idea of the pleasures of discovering new things on the island. Ironically, they work so as to achieve trivial artificial objectives seriously. There is no way for randomness, but order just like their former lives in the-so called- civilised world because they do not know any other way of living. Although they find themselves in an untouched environment, they do not try to keep it as it is or establish a system in harmony with this environment. What they establish as a system abuses the idea of utopia. This is because they have not changed their internalised way of thinking. At the end of the poem, an authoritarian civilised world is set up which controls over the nature and human life not allowing for any new discovery around people. In this poem the praised values are working like robots, without questions the task assigned them to do. Being cooperative to build a so-called civilised world is also another aspect of praise. On the other hand, feelings are somehow forbidden for the castaways

except the widow, Mary. The reader has no idea of any of the islanders' feeling except that widow. Her emotions, slowness and uncooperative manners stand on the counter side of the industriousness of the others. Does she deserve less respect for this?

The reason for the selection of this poem is that, the theme is a utopia through an island image, but even on a desert island human creates their own anti-utopia as soon as they have the chance of reaching a peaceful and harmonious life within nature. The main objective of this poem is to make students realize that technological development does not always mean improvement for the better of mankind and civilisation. On the contrary, being interested in the environment and harmony with nature should be main concern of the humans in order for reaching "utopia". This poem uses the image of island only to make reader realize that without changing the internalised way of hierarchy and power relationship thinking, for them life can only be coded on these principles. To sum up, choosing this poem would make students think on the issue of utopia and civilisation through island image.

To start with, instructor could use the method of "brainstorming" by drawing spider diagrams on board and since these ideas belong to students, they must appear on board until the end of the session. Brainstorming is used to reveal students' subconscious. They are going to tell first things they associate. With this poem, the very first key word to be used for brainstorming would be "civilisation". Instructor writes the key word on board and let students think on it and ask what they have associated with it at first sight. These ideas are important, since they are all students' production and are useful to reveal their internalised discourse on civilisation. On the other hand, what students say can be just the opposite of what the poem discusses. There is no point in forcing them come up with ideas related to the discourse of the poem at this stage. All answers should be written and left on board. At this stage their conditioned beliefs and ideas appear before them. After that, the next key word is "utopia". The utopia concept is central in this poem since it discusses an ideal life through 'island' image, but in a different way. These key words are all interrelated with each other and have got an aim within the process of questioning their conditioned beliefs. Finally, instructor writes, "island" on board and let students come up with its associations. At this stage students are already becoming to think on utopia and civilisation. At the end of brainstorming, the title of this poem should be discussed, because the word "castaways" is very important when plot is concerned.

Here is the poem by Adrian Mitchell,

### **THE CASTAWAYS OR VOTE FOR CALIBAN**

The Pacific Ocean –

A blue demi-globe.

Islands like punctuation marks.

A cruising airliner,

Passengers unwrapping pats of butter.

A hurricane arises,

Tosses the plane into the sea.

Five of them, flung on to an island beach,

Survived.

Tom the reporter.

Susan the botanist.

Jim the high- jump champion.

Bill the carpenter.

Mary the eccentric widow.

Tom the reporter sniffed out a stream of drinkable water.

Susan the botanist identified a banana tree.

Jim the high-jump champion jumped up and down and then each a bunch.

Bill the carpenter knocked up a table for their banana supper.

Mary the eccentric widow buried the banana skins,

But only after they had asked her twice.

They all gathered sticks and lit a fire.

There was an incredible sunset.

Next morning they held a committee meeting.

Tom, Susan, Jim and Bill

Voted to make the best of things.

Mary, the eccentric widow, abstained.

Tom the reporter killed several dozen wild pigs.  
Tanned their skins into parchment  
And printed the Island News with the ink of squids.

Susan the botanist developed new strains of banana  
Which tasted of chocolate, beefsteak, peanut butter,  
Chicken and bootpolish.

Jim the high-jump champion organised games  
Which he always won easily.

Bill the carpenter constructed a wooden water wheel  
And converted the water's energy into electricity.  
Using iron ore from the hills, he constructed lampposts.

They all worried about Mary, the eccentric widow,  
Her lack of confidence and her-  
But there wasn't time to coddle her.  
The volcano erupted, but they dug a trench  
And diverted the lava into the sea  
Where it formed a spectacular pier.  
They were attacked by pirates but defeated them  
With bamboo bazookas firing  
Sea-urchins packed with home-made nitro-glycerine.  
They gave the cannibals a dose of their own medicine  
And survived an earthquake thanks to their skill in jumping.

Tom had been a court reporter  
So he became the magistrate and solved disputes.  
Susan the Botanist established  
A university which also served as a museum.  
Jim the high-jump champion  
Was put in charge of law enforcement –



Jumped on them when they were bad.  
Bill the carpenter built himself a church,  
Preached there every Sunday.

But Mary the eccentric widow...  
Each evening she wandered down the island's main street,  
Past the Stock Exchange, the Houses of Parliament,  
The prison and the arsenal.  
Past the Prospero Souvenir Shop.  
Past the Robert Louis Stevenson Movie Studios,  
Past the Daniel Defoe Motel  
She nervously wandered and sat on the end of the pier of lava,

Breathing heavily,  
As if at a loss,  
As if at a lover,  
She opened her eyes wide  
To the usual incredible sunset.

Adrian Mitchell

(the poem was quoted from internet page-onestopenglish.com)

Here are some of the suggested comprehension questions for the analysis:

### **Comprehension, Interpretation, Production**

- Is the island in the poem like the one that is generally described as a place where people have thought of living on, in at least one period of their lifetime to escape from the daily routine's stress with the dream of the sunshine and a warm climate throughout the year?
- What kind of a world is depicted in the poem? What sort of division of labour do they have?

Is this environment familiar to you? Why/Why not?

- What is surprising on the island?
- What do the jobs of the castaways represent?

- How do these people feel on the island? Why do you think the only person is Mary whose feelings are revealed?
- What do these people do in order to survive and are these vital for survival?
- What kind of a viewpoint does this poem discuss?
- Is there an irony in the poem?
- What are the conflicts and contrasts on the discourse level of the poem? (with discourse level, it is meant structure, symbols, figures, signs, images and how all come together to create the potential meaning of the poem)
- Why is Mary defined as “eccentric”? When does a person feel like an outcast?
- Do you realize any oppression in the poem?
- Do you have any comments on the writer?
- According to the tone of the poem do you think the writer is male or female and why?

After discussing the answers, class goes back to the similarities and contrasts of their associates on board. Instructor may well ask which of them have been found within the poem and which of them have not. Discussing about it may help the students for the writing process that will follow this activity. Meanwhile, it could be useful to talk about “Caliban” in short and the story of the play “The Tempest” by Shakespeare to show how writers and their works inspire one another and what intertextuality is.

Comprehension, Interpretation, Production processes may take a long time since students might like to think before talking about each question. Since the main objective of this study is thinking practice, it would be convenient for the class take their time to discuss about the answers.

The next step may be planned for writing process to improve their writing skills as well as grammar. The writing topics could be about creating students' own utopia. The suggested topics might be the following.

What would it be like in Istanbul in 2080?

Suppose you have a time machine and have travelled to the future. What differences would amaze you? (Think about the social and political aspects, human relations, government systems, human rights, ecology etc. and focus your essay on one or more of the aspects while discussing your idea.)

What is your own personal utopia and how would you like the world to be? (This question may reveal the oppressions of the student in her/his

personal life in a metaphor or may reveal some internalised cliché discourses, so the teacher's evaluation of the writing and discussing about the point of view reflecting in the writing could be important to tend the student to be critical and to able to realize or to criticize her/his own way of seeing things apart from correcting grammar mistakes)

Evaluation criteria for the papers of the students can be set as follows:

Do the students have an argument? Is there a relevant thesis statement? Is the use of English correct? Are there any problems with accuracy? Does the paper have fictional integrity? (Discourse, images used) Is the paper coherent? Are the images used in the writing original? While discussing about the viewpoint revealed in the writing, students should not be judged, but teachers may just let them understand and know their way of seeing things and let them see that there may also be different viewpoints.

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The **Second** poem selected for this study is "Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost.

The poem is about making a hard decision in one period of a lifetime for an individual. At the end of the poem the reader gets the idea that, it was not an easy one to decide what to do, but the person in the poem may be considered that she/he has the power to resist the consequences of her/his own decision. The writer implies that, the person in the poem has chosen the difficult way. However, this choice makes the individual find herself/himself and live a life for her/his way. By this way, based on the general theme of this study, which is "individual and the society", unlike the first poem; this one deals with the subjective and personal view and emphasizes that making one's own decisions under no influence of others leads him to freedom.

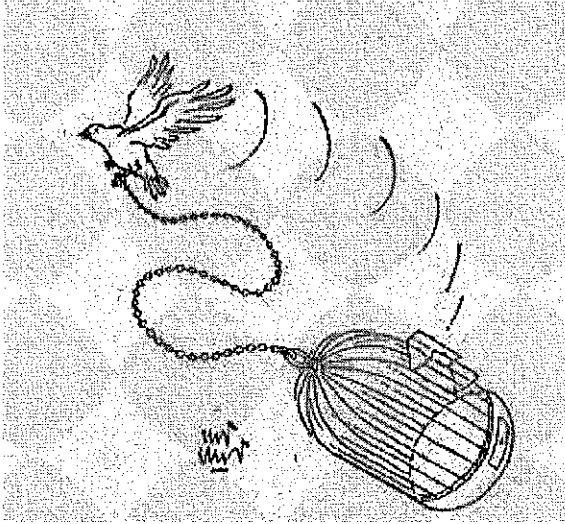
The poem discusses the identity and the problem of one's own individuality in the society through the "road" image, which indicates, "leading a personal life-style and having self-consciousness". To be able to struggle with the difficulties, to have the courage and power to bear the consequences of the self-made decisions and to keep on walking one's own way are the main points to feel free and to make it one's own way.

Before the analysis of the poem, as a preparation material for the class, this time a cartoon by Ali Ulvi has been selected, unlike brainstorming method used in the first poem. This cartoon also opens a new window enlarging the meaning of the poem. The cartoon discusses the problem of "freedom". In the cartoon there is a bird escaped from its cage and it is trying to fly but it is tied to

its cage with a chain from one foot. So, it cannot fly high or fly long distances when carrying the cage with it.

Hence, it is not easy to reach a free mind and bear the consequences of one's decision, as one's past follows her/him until she/he faces her/his past constraints. So, choosing one's own way is vital but not enough to reach what is expected as freedom. One should have various strategies, various solutions to face her/his past and should have the power to evaluate all aspects of her/his personal history and future plans with self-consciousness and social awareness when trying to lead her/his own way.

Here is the cartoon by Ali Ulvi:



Suggested questions to discuss about the cartoon: (İpşiroğlu; Özsoysal, 2002: 13-17)

What do you see in the cartoon?

Is the bird free?

How is it possible to get rid of the chain? Or What should be done to make it free from carrying its cage?

What does it mean to be free?

What does the cartoon say? What do you think the “bird”, “cage” and “chain” symbolize?

What does this cartoon remind you of? What does the cartoon refer to in our lives?

Can you tell us about the idea of freedom and also the idea of being an individual? Does freedom have any connection with choices we make in our lives?

**For creative writing by means of the cartoon:**

Discussion point could focus on the idea written below:

Bird is not free but thinks so. After a while it is going to learn that the chain is its obstacle. It must get rid of the chain to be free. It needs help. To be “me”, only me, has got a strong relationship between doing what I want in my own way and never regret of doing “it” in my way. To be free one needs to express herself/himself freely without the fear of being misunderstood. This is freedom and makes the individual happy.

After discussion, it is possible to apply a short writing practice, under the light of the discussed questions and answers. Students are free to express their ideas in various text forms, such as poem, short story, essay, letter, short drama, sketches etc. the important thing is to encourage them to use symbols of the cartoon to express themselves or their ideas, in order to lead them to symbolic expression to improve their ability of abstraction and ability to create images indirectly referring facts of their personal lives or the society they live in.

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Here is the poem by Robert Frost,

**THE ROAD NOT TAKEN**

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveller, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair  
 And having perhaps the better claim,  
 Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
 Though as for that, the passing there  
 Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay  
 In leaves no step had trodden black  
 Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
 Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
 I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
 Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
 Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –  
 I took the one less travelled by,  
 And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost  
 (Barnet, Berman, Burto, 1987: 531)

### **Comprehension, Interpretation**

Some questions:

What is this poem about?

What kind of a problem does the writer talk about?

Where does the story take place?

What is the message of this poem?

If the word "yellow" in the first line had been changed as "green" what effect it would make upon readers?

Do you think that the writer is happy about the decision he made and was it a difficult choice? Why?

**Possible Answers:**

- It is about a decision in one period of his life that has made all the difference. Doing just as the other people do things or being himself and living his way. This is not easy since it is a hard decision.
- Takes place in a forest. It is symbolic surely that forest is full of unknown creatures for people just like life. Forest can be both sinister and safe place if you know what to do and when to do.
- If you want you want to be yourself, do it your way and work on difficulties. This makes you a freer person.
- Yellow represents fall and after fall there is winter, which is difficult to survive unless one has done the necessary preparations. Green represents spring and after spring there is summer, which is easy to cope with. And "green" would not make the same effect on readers since yellow is related with difficulties in life one has to face and overcome.
- Yes. He stood long to decide which one to take, so it wasn't an easy decision.

**Suggestions for writing**

Why do you think he will be telling this story with a sigh? Prepare a short writing on that. **Students** are free to express their ideas in various text forms, such as poem, short story, short-short story, essay, letter, short drama, sketches etc.

Prepare a short writing about which decisions make people free indeed and which ones make them confused?

What could it be the manipulations on decisions about the meaning of life, about the purpose of life or how to lead a –so-called- good life, life standarts, the ways of happiness, one's needs etc.? What could it be the conflicts? Have you had any conflicts between your own decisions about your life and what you are told by the others?

Are there any effects of cultural aspects, ideals of families or socio-political aspects of a country on one's decisions?

## Notes On Creating A Book Project

This type of instruction can be applied to all levels of learners of English from elementary to advanced. The most important aspect for this type of education is the selection of the suitable text in order for teaching reception and thinking practice and creative writing. In order for choosing the right type of literary works from the world of literature, first instructor should determine the type of thinking practice suitable for their program. After that, literary works not written in English may be translated into English. This process would lead to develop critical thinking in students, help them overcome the fear of thinking and, finally, a book project, which demands production from students. Such a book project would activate instructors to create new ideas and teaching models. By the help of this book, teachers of English may develop new teaching models or can create their own techniques based on the principles in the book. They can apply the same pathway for the texts they choose themselves for their classrooms.

Literary works; like essays, poetry, fiction and drama genres could be used. It is important that the texts should be putting forward a different viewpoints and discussing a way of thinking. In this project not only English or American literature, but also Turkish literature can be used. Here are some examples of literary works that can be used for this project; Mary Sarton's *The Rewards of Living a Solitary Life* discusses being an individual, Judy Syfer's *I Want a Wife* deals with the issue of gender. These are examples of essays. For poetry; *The Unknown Citizen* by W.H.Auden discusses the effects of modern life on the individual. And also freedom and happiness. *What's That Smell In The Kitchen?* By Marge Piercy questions the issue of gender and women's life style. Bertolt Brecht's *Epic of the Dead Soldier* discusses the reasons of war through a metaphor. *The Negro in the Canteen* by Nicolas Born puts forward a hidden segregation through irony is an example of a short story. Another short story for this project is *Before the Law* by Franz Kafka. It discusses the relationship between law and individual through metaphor.

For this project translations from Turkish literature can also be made. The suggested works are as follows: Nazlı Eray's *Kadın Tohumu*, *Monte Kristo* are examples of short stories dealing with the issue of gender through irony. Aziz Nesin's *Nötron Bombası* is an essay on nitrogen bomb. He says that this bomb is a phenomenal invention for the salvation of mankind and ironically criticizes armament. Nazım Hikmet's poem *Neyi Bildirir Sayılar* puts forward the destruction of war. Around various themes the examples can be increased. These sort of literary works, both are open-ended, didactic and full of textual alienations such as irony, metaphor, symbols etc. So, they give a different viewpoint alternatively against clichés through not only their contents but also



writing styles and structural differences and they break the pacifism of the reader for a thinking process.

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