

## **The Ten Rights of Literature: A Didactic Approach for Fourth Grade in Portuguese Primary Schools**

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**ABSTRACT:** In this article, I describe the principles and implications of literary education at the primary school level in Portugal. If teachers are committed to fostering affective and aesthetic relationships with literary texts and not merely using them as a means to develop competencies related to reading and grammar skills, their respect for the rights of literature is crucial. Here, I provide concrete, practical examples of how this goal might be achieved in the classroom, based on Portuguese literary texts that are commonly read in the fourth grade / year 4 classroom (4.º ano de escolaridade).

**KEYWORDS:** interpretation, literature, Portuguese literature, primary school, reading, text

**RESUMO:** Neste artigo, descrevo os princípios e as implicações da educação literária no 1.º Ciclo do Ensino Básico em Portugal. Se os professores estiverem comprometidos com a finalidade de fomentar relações afetivas e estéticas dos alunos com os textos literários e não apenas com a utilização destes para desenvolver competências relacionadas com a leitura e a gramática, o seu respeito pelos direitos da literatura é crucial. Apresento, aqui, exemplos práticos e concretos de como este objetivo pode ser atingido na sala de aula, com base em textos literários que costumam ser lidos no 4.º ano do Ensino Básico.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** interpretação, literatura, literatura portuguesa, ensino básico, leitura, texto

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### **Introduction**

Reading full literary works is a practice that may become increasingly rare in Portuguese primary schools, given that the national curriculum was revoked in July 2021 by order of the state secretary for education (Despacho no. 6605-A/2021) and is unlikely to be replaced by another that will allow “literary education” to survive. Fortunately, however—at least for the moment—teachers are still expected to provide students with aesthetic reading experiences that favor their affective involvement with literature. A brief look at the most relevant official documents will allow us to understand why.

In 2009, the national syllabus of Portuguese for Basic Education<sup>1</sup> stated that “o convívio frequente com textos literários adequados à faixa etária dos alunos assume uma importância fundamental neste ciclo, tal como a descoberta de diversas modalidades de textos, escritos e multimodais” (Reis 2009, 22). The “curricular goals” (metas curriculares) published in 2012 went one step further by institutionalizing specific aims for literary education, which were for the first time separated from the goals set for the domain of reading (Paixão 2021, 28).

However, it was the 2015 syllabus that established literary education as a “kind of new competency” (Meirim 2021, 13), introducing it as one of the “content domains” (along with orality, reading/writing, and grammar) and justifying its inclusion as follows: “vem dar mais consistência e sentido ao ensino da língua, fortalecendo a associação curricular da formação de leitores com a matriz cultural e de cidadania” (Buescu et al. 2015, 8).

The same document listed the following objectives related to literary education:

14. Interpretar textos orais e escritos, de expressão literária e não literária, de modalidades gradualmente mais complexas.
15. Interpretar textos literários de diferentes géneros e graus de complexidade, com vista à construção de um conhecimento sobre a literatura e a cultura portuguesas, valorizando-as enquanto património de uma comunidade.
16. Apreciar criticamente a dimensão estética dos textos literários, portugueses e estrangeiros, e o modo como manifestam experiências e valores. (Buescu et al. 2015, 5)

As objectives 14 and 15 make clear, *interpretation* of written texts—literary and nonliterary—was key. But there was also a need to help children build their own knowledge of Portuguese literature and culture while valuing them as part of the cultural “heritage of a community.” Furthermore, according to objective 16, students were meant to “critically appreciate the aesthetic dimension of literary texts.”

As to how teachers might develop these competencies in six- to nine-year-old children, the document gave little guidance, stating that the mere fact of reading or listening to literary texts was conducive to students’ understanding and appreciating them. However, the way in which it defined contents, objectives, and competencies gave ample reason for teachers to use literary texts mostly as a means to (a) train and check students’ reading skills and (b) teach and consolidate grammar topics. And textbooks, which are predominantly used as a primary classroom resource, helped them engage in these practices.

However, in a set of documents published in 2018 entitled *Aprendizagens essenciais*, the Portuguese government stated that, concerning the fourth grade of primary education (4.º ano de escolaridade), “a aula de Português estará orientada para o desenvolvimento da . . . educação literária com a criação de uma relação afetiva e estética com a literatura e com textos literários orais e escritos, através da leitura de poemas, de textos de teatro, de narrativas e da construção de um percurso de leitor a realizar com o acompanhamento do professor usando a metodologia de projeto” (República Portuguesa Educação 2018, 4). Teachers were thus instructed to use project-based methodologies in encouraging each student to build up their own literary repertoire, which would involve recreational rather than instrumental reading. As to how a “Portuguese class” might foster an “affective and aesthetic relationship with literature,” the following guidelines (“ações estratégicas de ensino”) were provided:

Promover estratégias que envolvam:

—aquisição de saberes (noções elementares de géneros como contos de fadas, lengalengas, poemas) proporcionados por

- escuta ativa;
- leitura;

—compreensão de narrativas literárias com base num percurso de leitura que implique

- imaginar desenvolvimentos narrativos a partir de elementos do paratexto e da mobilização de experiências e vivências;
- antecipar ações narrativas a partir de sequências de descrição e de narração;
- mobilizar conhecimentos sobre a língua e sobre o mundo para interpretar expressões e segmentos de texto;
- justificar as interpretações;
- questionar aspetos da narrativa.

—criação de experiências de leitura (por exemplo na biblioteca escolar) que impliquem

- ler e ouvir ler;
- dramatizar, recitar, recontar, recriar, ilustrar;
- exprimir reações subjetivas de leitor;
- avaliar situações, comportamentos, modos de dizer, ilustrações, entre outras dimensões;

- persuadir colegas para a leitura de livros escolhidos. – realização de percursos pedagógico-didáticos interdisciplinares, com Matemática, Estudo do Meio e Expressões, tendo por base obras literárias e textos de tradição popular. (República Portuguesa Educação 2018, 9–10)

Despite being called “strategic actions,” what these guidelines provide is a set of instructions for what students should be capable of doing, or what teachers should ask them to do, concerning their literary experiences.

Still, it is commendable that these directions granted teachers enough freedom to come up with their own ideas and solutions in regard to the activities and strategies that they should implement—and how. And it is important to note that besides listening/reading and interpreting/understanding texts, the guidelines cited also mention other activities that require an emotional involvement with literature, such as thinking about texts, anticipating their content, questioning certain narrative elements, establishing connections between the texts and their experiences, imagining possible developments, illustrating and re-creating texts, sharing personal and subjective reactions to them, and arguing in favor of selected books.

Side by side with the so-called strategic actions, this official document also lists the actual “knowledge competencies, skills, and attitudes” that students should be capable of displaying:

- Ouvir ler textos literários e expressar reações de leitura de modo criativo.
- Ler integralmente narrativas, poemas e textos dramáticos.
- Antecipar o(s) tema(s) com base em noções elementares de género (contos de fada, lengalengas, poemas, etc.) em elementos do paratexto e nos textos visuais (ilustrações).
- Compreender a organização interna e externa de textos poéticos, narrativos e dramáticos.
- Compreender recursos que enfatizam o sentido do texto (onomatopeias, trocadilhos, interjeições, comparações).
- Dramatizar textos e dizer em público, com expressividade e segurança, poemas memorizados.
- Participar, de forma responsável e cooperante, em representações de textos dramáticos literários.
- Manifestar ideias, sentimentos e pontos de vista suscitados por histórias ou poemas ouvidos ou lidos.

- Desenvolver um projeto de leitura em que se integre compreensão da obra, questionamento e motivação de escrita do autor. (República Portuguesa Educação 2018, 9–10)

Again, these competencies and attitudes are consistent with the goal of fostering in students an affective and aesthetic relationship with literature, in that they include expressing reactions to texts in creative ways; reading whole texts (rather than excerpts); appreciating the literary, poetic quality of language (e.g., the use of figures of speech); interpreting texts dramatically (e.g., impersonating characters and “living” the texts); and sharing ideas and feelings provoked by texts.

Let us recall that, of the abovementioned official documents, only this last one is still in effect, since the 2015 syllabus was revoked. It appears that as of 2021–22, teachers will no longer be provided with an official syllabus that defines content and teaching objectives. Rather, they will receive only student-oriented guidelines focused on the students’ competencies and “profile,” the *Perfil dos Alunos à Saída da Escolaridade Obrigatória* (Martins 2017).

### **I. Fostering an Affective and Aesthetic Relationship with Literature**

Fortunately, the documents entitled *Aprendizagens essenciais* continue to be valid, so primary school teachers of Portuguese are still expected to foster students’ *affective and aesthetic relationships with literature through reading*.<sup>2</sup> This is a valid goal indeed, as it stems from love and respect for literary texts of the kind that should, precisely, be read *aesthetically* rather than *effereently*, as Louise Rosenblatt never tired of stressing (Rosenblatt 1994). Her famous statement that “no one can read a poem for you” (86) summarizes the idea that literary reading experiences are personal and irreducible to drill activities that imply that the meaning of a text is predetermined and that all readers have to conform to it.

On the contrary, students’ relationships with literature should be personal, genuine, and emotional, in order to be *affective*, and based on artistic sensitivity, in order to be *aesthetic*. Furthermore, in order to promote these relationships, teachers must act as intermediaries of individual, meaningful reading experiences of literary texts—a challenging task, if we consider that literature acts with the same “indiscriminate impact of life” (Candido 2002, 84), which means that such relationships cannot be wholly predicted or controlled, lest their authenticity be jeopardized.

Fostering affective and aesthetic relationships with literature implies giving students enough time—within or outside the classroom—to *savor* the texts they

are reading; to be confused and uncertain about their meaning; to listen to the teacher while he/she reads favorite, familiar texts but also while they interpret new, unfamiliar texts, in order to witness effective ways of dealing with comprehension difficulties; to express immediate reactions to the texts; to develop their interpretations as they exchange and discuss ideas with other readers; and to actively build collective interpretations as each reader contributes their own views, based on their unique experiences, knowledge, and sensitivity. Needless to say, if teachers want to guarantee that their students have the opportunity to become emotionally attached to literature, they should not merely follow the instructions set out in guidelines and textbooks. They must remember what they are dealing with: *literature*, which is to say, a *form of art* that is mainly composed of words and happens to require a competency that is learned at school but is, still, a *form of art*. And any form of art demands two interrelated attitudes from those who want to give it their full, genuine attention: *freedom* and *play*.

In that respect, it should be noted that the Portuguese National Arts Plan (Plano Nacional das Artes) and the National Program for Aesthetic and Artistic Education (Programa de Educação Estética e Artística) both mention *literature* as one of the artistic manifestations that children should encounter in formal educational contexts. Both also make an explicit reference to the importance of *play* and *freedom* in the appreciation of art, stating that “as artes podem ensinar-nos a inestimável lição da gratuidade. A do tempo liberto, sem porquê nem para quê, a do prazer desinteressado diante da beleza” (Comissão Executiva do Plano Nacional das Artes 2019, 17). This document goes so far as to defend the following: “As práticas artísticas podem renovar os processos pedagógicos—evitando uma lógica instrumental do uso das artes e a sua domesticação. Desse modo, articulando a educação e a cultura (no plural), poderemos potenciar a experiência de um ‘espaço franco,’ onde se valorize a contemplação, o lúdico, a descoberta, a gratuidade e a liberdade. Uma forma de afirmar a força plástica da vida—sem o peso do medo de errar. Como indica o ensinamento atribuído a Aristóteles, ‘educar não é encher um copo, mas acender uma chama’” (Comissão Executiva do Plano Nacional das Artes 2019, 17).

This position is in total agreement with Daniel Pennac’s ideal of reading (*literature*): “Le verbe lire ne supporte pas l’impératif” (Pennac 1992, 13). It is also in harmony with any concept of literature that does not subdue it to any other purpose except its enjoyment. Obviously, if one is instructed or forced to “enjoy” it, the authenticity, the meaningfulness, and the depth of the relationship between

reader and work will be compromised, just as one cannot be forced to play a game if one is to enjoy it. This does not mean that “playing” literature (and with literature) is a lawless activity: it entails the choice to conform to certain rules, such as adhering to a set of reading protocols that include pretending to believe the “lies” told in the text, accepting that the narrator is not the same person as the author, interpreting certain phrases as metaphorical and certain aspects as symbolic, and so forth. The rules of the game are determined by a tacit agreement between author and reader, and the actual enjoyment of the process depends on them.

## II. The Ten Rights of Literature

Following Daniel Pennac’s original list of ten “inalienable rights of the reader” (Pennac 1992), intended to safeguard the necessary freedom underlying recreational reading—the only kind of reading he considers, when it comes to literature—I felt the need to define the (also inalienable) rights of literature itself. This need arose from an urge to protect literary texts from the undermining and subversive tendency to reduce them to learning tools, to means used in the primary classroom to reach certain didactic ends. These are too often not related to fostering affective, aesthetic relationships with literature, because they intend to serve purposes concerned with developing and verifying skills within specific domains of learning: reading and grammar.

By repeatedly asking students to rephrase and explain the meaning of certain sentences or verses, by instructing them to look for explicit and implicit information in the text and copy it onto the lines provided in the textbook or in their notebooks, by requiring them to provide objective, uniform answers (such as ordering the different parts of a broken summary of the text), and by resorting to so many other mechanical exercises where *all answers are the same, no matter how many different students provide them*, teachers will hardly contribute to making students feel affectively connected to literature. Instead, they will contribute to making students regard literature as a learning tool—for which reason they will be less and less likely to turn to it, throughout their school years, as a recreational activity.<sup>3</sup>

### 1. The Right to Be Read and Interpreted in the “Here and Now”

Teachers come into the classroom equipped with knowledge about the particular works of literature with which they put students in contact. When they simulate the act of interpreting texts during and after reading them, they are really only

pretending, as they have already researched whatever information was necessary to be able to talk about what the text means and how its meaning is conveyed, how certain literary devices are used, what symbols the text presents, and what underlying messages it cleverly hides. Students might call this “cheating” if they were aware of the fact that in order to truly read literature, you must do this work yourself, not have others do it for you and then just present *their* findings as if they were your own. Literature is written to be read directly, not vicariously.

## **2. The Right to Be Savored with Enough Time**

Time (or lack of it) seems to be one of the biggest enemies of the enjoyment of literature—and it is also the most common excuse to set aside the somewhat idealistic goal of fostering students’ affective and aesthetic relationships with literary texts. The limited number of minutes for each lesson, the limited number of lessons, the limited number of hours of study allocated to each topic of the syllabus, and the profusion of topics to be covered, not to mention the need to evaluate students on knowledge and competencies according to various and specific official goals: all contribute to literary texts’ being read, analyzed, and “worked on” on the clock. However, literature demands time. It should be read under peaceful circumstances, at a pace that allows readers to stop and wonder, to reconsider, to reread parts they failed to understand, to exchange ideas with other readers about what they make of the text, and so forth. If they are unable to grant the necessary time for readers to develop affective relationships with texts, teachers cannot expect to achieve this goal, and we might as well recognize that it is merely wishful thinking.

## **3. The Right to Be Accompanied by Its Whole Paratext**

The textbook is the book’s greatest enemy. When textbooks are used to read literary texts—most of which will be thus reduced to decontextualized excerpts—this means that students do not have direct contact with the printed works, which is to say that they have no access to the paratext that accompanies each literary text. As readers may have noticed, the guidelines cited in the introduction mention that the paratext should be used to elicit students’ ideas about “narrative developments” (República Portuguesa Educação 2018, 9–10). But much more important than that, the paratext plays a crucial part in establishing the contours and the character of the literary text as an object (of attention and interest), thus fostering the kind of affective relationship that teachers should aim to promote.<sup>4</sup>



#### 4. The Right to Be Read in Full

Too often, longer texts are presented to students in excerpts, especially in textbooks. This means that they only have access to a portion of the whole, which does not allow them to grasp and enjoy the work at length. A literary text is a whole, a unit whose identity and meaning depend on its completeness, so it should be respected and appreciated as such. Of course, some extracts of literary texts presented to students can serve the purpose of developing and verifying their reading and interpretation skills, and these texts' words, sentences, and paragraphs can be very appropriate for certain grammar exercises. But teachers must be aware that when they use curtailed texts rather than unabridged works, students are less likely to feel affectively connected to literature, or at least to feel as emotionally interested in it as they might be if they had access to whole texts, preferably accompanied by their paratexts.

#### 5. The Right to Be Read Aloud

Literature is not necessarily conceived to be read aloud, but this does not mean that the text and the reader do not gain from the activity of making the words resonate within and without. In kindergarten, it is by listening to others read literary texts that children are introduced to the pleasure of getting to know stories and poems and allowing the texts to stir their emotions, stimulate their thinking and imagining, and add to their life experiences. As Pennac has demonstrated, adolescents can also benefit from this, if teachers have the initiative to read aloud to them. Clearly, primary school children can (and should) also be exposed to literature orally. This is a valuable opportunity for them to enjoy contact with texts that might otherwise be too dense, too difficult, or too long for an affective relationship to arise.

#### 6. The Right to Be Contextualized

Unlike what happens at the secondary level, primary level literary education is not focused on the historical, political, cultural, and literary contexts that influenced a writer and can be identified in the style and themes of that writer's work. Fortunately (and one cannot repeat this enough), it is focused on *establishing affective and aesthetic relationships with literature*. This may imply that reading the actual texts matters more than learning facts about when, how, and why they were written. It may also mean that, in some cases, learning those facts might stimulate interest in the text itself: it might make readers look at it with more attention or

feel emotions that draw them closer to it. One only has to think of Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl* to acknowledge that this right of literature is of great importance for the work to be duly respected, understood, and admired.

### **7. The Right to Be Connected with Other Texts and Works of Art**

One of the pleasures readers derive from their relationships with literature stems from establishing connections between texts. Each work of literature resonates with a number of others, and readers are in tune with their previous readings, so intertextual connections can be established in two directions. Furthermore, some texts, like fables and folktales, circulate in several versions that can be compared and contrasted. And it is also possible to establish connections between literary texts and other works of art (musical pieces, paintings, sculptures, photographs, and the like). The limit is only defined by the reader's imagination and willingness to make those connections . . . or should be. In reality, at school, the limit is determined by what teachers decide to do with texts—and how they do it.

### **8. The Right to Be Puzzling**

Literature might be defined as the kind of text that oscillates between wanting to communicate something important and not wanting to be clear about the message. To be literary (rather than literal), a text must be vague, suggestive, and ambiguous. So it can only be expected—and accepted—that it will provoke some degree of puzzlement and confusion in readers. Of course, we readers do appreciate it when we come across beautifully transparent lines that cast a revealing light upon a significant truth. However, we can also acknowledge that ambiguity of meaning(s) and a certain degree of opacity in language make literature intriguing and stimulating; indeed, they make the “game” worth playing. Therefore, teachers who love literature and want students to feel the same way about it are not reluctant to point out and appreciate passages or even whole texts that baffle readers rather than enlighten them, thus reminding us that no one can (or should) have the last word about what a text “really means.”

### **9. The Right to Shock, Aggravate, and Displease**

It might have been noted that the official guidelines quoted in the introduction leave very little space for teachers to promote *other* ways of reading and discussing literature. Why, for example, should students be asked to “persuade

colleagues to read chosen books” (República Portuguesa Educação 2018, 9–10) without inviting them to make a book “unrecommendation,” explaining why they did not enjoy a particular literary encounter? Does the fact that they should “question aspects of the narrative” imply that they are not supposed to question aspects of a poem or theatrical play? And could they not question their own interpretations—or those of their colleagues or their teacher?

If it is assumed that all students will enjoy all the literary experiences promoted by the school, there is a risk that some students may feel uncomfortable and perhaps resentful if they are unable to discover or share that pleasure. Given that most of the texts they will read are compulsory, they should be allowed to express feelings and thoughts of anger, shock, distaste, disgust, and other, more or less frustrating reactions to texts that are best allowed out in the open if we mean to direct students toward a fulfilling relationship with literature. As we know, many authors wish to provoke readers, to make them uncomfortable, to shake their worlds—and, if they are good writers, they succeed in this goal. By conducting literary analyses that only allow readers to agree on their interpretations and praise the aesthetic qualities of a text, we are depriving them of the chance to express a whole host of emotions that might not fit in the scheme but are still valid and interesting ways of appreciating literature. In my opinion, it is important to allow students—from the moment they start interpreting literary texts until the end of their school trajectory—to understand that appreciating, and valuing, literature is compatible with feeling disgusted, aggravated, or offended by it.

### **10. The Right to Be Discussed, Analyzed, Reread, and Reinterpreted**

This right is linked with the first one, in that it presupposes that literature is read in the “here and now,” not vicariously. The classroom should not be a place where teachers and students discuss what others have already stated about works of literature, but a place where the meaning of texts is constructed, negotiated, and considered, according to the judgment of the actual group of people who are reading together. Teachers must thus be prepared to let go of all their preconceived ideas and former readings of the same text and start all over again, as if they were reading it for the first time. In a sense, they are. The context is unique, and the time is the present, so their reading of a text—even if it is a text they have read before—is bound to be different from any previous or subsequent readings. Furthermore, they are accompanied by a group of other readers who

will provide their singular insights into the collective interpretation. And literature itself can only benefit from this plurality of continuous and ever-renovated readings. Let us not forget Italo Calvino's definition of a classic (which is valid for any work of literature): "a book that has never exhausted all it has to say to its readers" (Calvino 2000, 5).

### III. A Didactic Approach for Fourth Grade in Portuguese Primary Schools

This section provides concrete, practical examples of how the purpose of *fostering affective and aesthetic relationships with literature* might be achieved in the classroom, using Portuguese literary texts that were recommended for the fourth grade in the recently revoked syllabus.

Since classroom activities based on reading a literary text should take the ten rights of literature into account, especially if teachers want to promote affective, aesthetic relationships between students and literary texts, these suggestions focus on *aesthetic* rather than *efferent* reading (Rosenblatt 1994), which means that they are conceived in such a way as to:

- focus on a genuine, "here and now" reaction and analysis of the text;
- favor students' personal, subjective, and emotional involvement with the text;
- allow for different readers to provide different answers to the same questions (which implies a flexible attitude and a preference for questions for which there is no wrong answer); and
- accept that students' reactions and ideas about the text will not necessarily conform to a preconceived or consensual interpretation of that text.

To show the difference between efferent and aesthetic reading activities, I present these suggestions side by side with more typical textbook/worksheet exercises about the same texts. The tables below show examples of questions and instructions that require an efferent stance on the left (in grey)—which are not to be taken as my suggestions—and examples of more valuable activities that lead toward establishing affective, aesthetic relationships with literature (on the right).

Efferent activities elicit the same answer from all students, so they provide no opportunity for readers to develop or present a personal point of view about the text. Moreover, if students do not know the answer to a question, they are more likely to feel anxious or frustrated about the activity, because they expect each question to have only one correct answer. When used repeatedly, the efferent

stance invites students to merely skim through the text to find the information needed to complete the exercises. Some students might even be tempted to copy their answers from a colleague, since what is asked from them does not require a personal interpretation or involvement with the text.

To be sure, textbooks also offer some suggestions for aesthetic reading activities, but far fewer than the kinds of questions that require objective, uniform answers. Most textbook activities are designed to check that students understood what they read (which is considered a priority, especially at primary level) rather than to promote their affective involvement with the text. Activities that allow for such involvement, granting students the necessary freedom to react to the text in personal, creative ways, are usually consigned to the final part of the time dedicated to reading comprehension—and they will only be done if, and when, there is enough time (and if teachers are willing).

When implementing aesthetic reading activities in the classroom, it is important not only to give students enough time to read and reread the text (as well as to listen to the teacher or to another professional reading it) but also to allow students to respond orally, rather than in writing, at least some of the time. Some fourth graders will still be struggling to perfect their penmanship, and their effort to succeed in that mechanically challenging task is likely to require much of their attention, thus possibly compromising their interest in, and focus on, playing along with the literary game. Thus, it is important that teachers find ways in which students can enjoy their encounters with literature by truly “diving” into the texts and “being” the characters (Wilhelm and Novak 2011).

### **“Mistérios”: A Poem by Matilde Rosa Araújo**

This poem, by the acclaimed Portuguese writer of children’s literature Matilde Rosa Araújo, was published in 1988 in a book entitled *Mistérios*, which was one of the seven titles chosen for year 4 listed in the national syllabus of Portuguese for Basic Education.

The suggestions for reading activities below are based on the poem with the same title as the book: “Mysteries.” It is about a fisherman who comes back from the sea with his net full of the fish that he had caught overnight, while the stars above are asleep in the morning light. Having offered readers this suggestive image, the poet makes a final remark about how people “who eat a fish / don’t dream these mysteries.”

**Efferent reading activities**

Familiarize students with the structure and conventions of poetic texts. E.g.:

As you may have noticed, this text is a poem. Indicate the number of: stanzas \_\_\_\_ lines or verses \_\_\_\_

Ask students to search for explicit information in the text. E.g.:

What two elements of nature are said to be “stuck” in the poem?

Ask students to infer implicit information from the text. E.g.:

Why are the stars said to be “asleep in the morning light”?

**Aesthetic reading activities**

Invite students to recite the poem expressively. E.g.:

Once you have discussed the meaning of this poem with your peers and teacher, watch these videos by Rodolfo Castro and prepare to read the poem expressively. Then take turns and recite it for the class. It is important that you say the words in the poem as if you had written them yourself, with all your heart. This means you will each read it in your own way.

Invite students to explore the paratext and establish relationships between its elements. E.g.:

This book has an interesting inscription at the beginning. How would you establish a connection between its content and the poem “Mysteries”?

Give students the opportunity to express insecurity, dislike, etc. about the text. E.g.:

Many people dislike poetry and say that it is difficult to understand. Do you relate to this perspective? Explain why, using this poem (or another poem from the same book) to illustrate your point of view.

**Efferent reading activities**

Use the text to teach students about rhetorical devices. E.g.:

«E as estrelas no céu / presas dormiam».

In this passage, the poet uses a rhetorical device called personification.

Try to explain what it consists of, taking its name into account.

**Aesthetic reading activities**

Allow students to appreciate the aesthetic quality of the text by stimulating their artistic sensitivity. E.g.:

Imagine that this poem's words are the lyrics for a song. Find or compose a musical background to it (you can ask your music teacher for help) and sing it, if you like. Alternatively, you can create a shadow puppet play based on the poem.

(Do this activity in pairs or groups, or as a whole class.)

Familiarize students with the author of the text. E.g.:

Read a biography of Matilde Rosa Araújo and make notes about: year of birth, job, books published, relevant activities, prizes won, date of death.

Invite students to interpret the text in a personal way. E.g.:

Imagine that you are the author of this poem. What would you say to people who asked you why you made that observation about people who eat fish not dreaming of such mysteries?

**“Vem aí o Zé das Moscas”: A Play by António Torrado**

A screenwriter and author of countless stories for children, António Torrado wrote the book *Teatro às três pancadas* (Torrado 1995) to respond to a request that was often made to him to write plays that might be performed by children at school. This title was also on the list of books recommended for fourth grade, and teachers were asked to select three plays. The suggestions here are based on the second play in the book, which is about a man who is permanently harassed by flies that keep buzzing around his head and seeks help to solve his problem. He sees a doctor, then a lawyer, a veterinarian, and a judge. It is the judge who finally “cures” the man by giving him permission to kill the flies, which he does immediately, by smacking one that had landed on the judge’s bald head.

**Efferent reading activities**

Familiarize students with the structure and conventions of drama. E.g.:

Fill in the blanks with the missing words:

This text is a t\_\_\_\_\_ p\_\_\_\_\_, destined to be enacted on the s\_\_\_\_\_. It is composed of two types of text: the main text, composed of the d\_\_\_\_\_ between the characters, and the secondary text, composed of the stage directions.

Ask students to search for explicit information in the text. E.g.:

List the characters that appear in this play.

Ask students to infer implicit information from the text. E.g.:

Quote passages from the text that serve to show that the main character is humble and not very clever.

**Aesthetic reading activities**

Invite students to interpret the text dramatically. E.g.:

Read the play in silence first and then aloud with your peers and Portuguese teacher. Ask your drama teacher to help you perform it and prepare a show for other classes or the whole school to watch.

Invite students to talk about the emotions they felt while reading the text. E.g.:

What made you laugh and what made you feel sad when you read this play? Share your response with the class and discuss how the words used in the text provoked those emotions.

Sensitize students to acknowledge how certain details in the text allow readers to “watch” the play in their minds as they read it. E.g.:

Listen to this recording, in which fourth-grade students read the text aloud. Try to identify what is “lost” in this audio version of the text by rereading it carefully as you listen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5vn8Cl81A7k>



**Effert reading activities**

Verify students’ understanding of the text as an organized whole composed of several parts. E.g.:

Order the sentences according to the sequence of events in the play.

- \_\_\_ Zé das Moscas goes to see the judge.
- \_\_\_ The police officer suggests he should see a lawyer.
- \_\_\_ The doctor does not help Zé das Moscas.
- \_\_\_ Zé das Moscas hits the judge in the head.
- \_\_\_ The lawyer suggests he should see a vet.

**Aesthetic reading activities**

Invite students to construe the text in a meaningful way. E.g.:

In many stories, the characters learn a valuable lesson, and so does the reader.

Do you agree with this statement, considering the play you have just read? What valuable lessons did the characters learn? What about you?

Familiarize students with the author of the text. E.g.:

Do a search about the author and fill in his biography with the missing information.

Antônio Torrado was born in \_\_\_\_\_ and he worked as a t\_\_\_\_\_, a s\_\_\_\_\_ and a w\_\_\_\_\_. He published over \_\_\_\_\_ books and was awarded the G\_\_\_\_\_ prize for children’s literature in 1979.

He died in \_\_\_\_\_.

Invite students to read other texts by the same author. E.g.:

Read the other four plays in the book and decide which one is your favorite. Explain why to the class.

**“A flauta mágica”: A Folk Tale**

The final set of suggestions is based on a text that is not accompanied by its paratext, to account for situations when it is not possible for all the students in the classroom to have access to the book. We aim to show that even when pupils read literature from a textbook, it is possible to engage them in activities that allow for personal, genuine reactions to be shared and for other important rights of literature to be safeguarded.

The suggestions presented here are based on the adapted version of the tale published in the textbook *Giroflé: Língua portuguesa 4.º ano de escolaridade* (Marques, Santos, and Gonçalves 2006, 30). This folk tale was first collected by Teófilo Braga, who was a prominent Portuguese politician, writer, and researcher. It was published in 1883 under the title “A gaita maravilhosa,” along with other stories, in a collection entitled *Contos tradicionais do povo português* (Braga 2013). The version in the textbook is somewhat different, but the main event is the same: a man with a donkey carrying a load of crockery to be sold at the market walks past a boy who starts playing his harmonica. The moment they hear the music, both man and donkey dance until all the crockery is on the ground, broken into pieces. The man is furious and takes the boy to the local judge, demanding justice. The judge asks to hear the music, and when the boy starts playing the harmonica, everyone begins to dance as if they were in a ballroom, including the judge’s elderly mother, who had been lying in bed in a room next door. The judge is overwhelmed with joy, for his mother had been unable to move for years. He allows the boy to go free, even though he had caused great harm, because he had also caused great good.

### Efferent reading activities

Ask students to search for explicit information in the text. E.g.:

When and where is this story set?

### Aesthetic reading activities

Invite students to react emotionally to the text. E.g.:

How did you like this story?

\_\_\_ Not at all.

\_\_\_ It was fine.

\_\_\_ I loved it.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Give at least one reason for your answer.

## Efferent reading activities

Ask students to infer implicit information from the text. E.g.:

*Why does the text state that the judge's office turned into "a lively ballroom"?*

Use parts of the text to teach grammar topics (spelling, morphology, lexicon, syntax, punctuation, etc.). E.g.:

*Fill in the table with the words that appear in green in the text, depending on the sound of the letter X.*

Use the text to develop metacognitive and literacy skills. E.g.:

*Check a dictionary to find out the meaning of the words that appear in bold in the text.*

Use the text to improve students' general knowledge. E.g.:

*Do a search on the Internet and find out the name of the writer who collected and published this folk tale, along with many others, in 1883: T\_\_\_\_\_ B\_\_\_\_\_.*

## Aesthetic reading activities

Invite students to identify with, and possibly relate to, the characters. E.g.:

*If you were the donkey's owner, how would you react to the judge's decision? Explain your point of view.*

Allow students to express themselves creatively, using the text as a source of inspiration. E.g.:

*Imagine that you are a writer and feel like adding another part to the story or changing it. Write some lines or paragraphs that might be added to the beginning, the middle, or the end of the text (or that might replace a part you do not like so much).*

Invite students to reflect upon puzzling aspects of the text or to deal with ambiguity. E.g.:

*Why do you think the harmonica player only stopped playing when all the crockery was in pieces? Share your answer with the class.*

Invite students to read other versions of the same story, or texts with interesting similarities and contrasts. E.g.:

*Read this version of the folk tale\* and discuss the differences and similarities between the two narratives of the same story with your peers and teacher.*

\*See Eugénia Edviges, "A gaita milagrosa," Na rua do pinheiro (blog), <http://narudadopinheiro.blogspot.com/2013/10/a-gaita-milagrosa-historia-tradicional.html>.

## Final Note

These suggestions for aesthetic reading activities aim to provide examples of the many ways in which primary school teachers might keep the path open for affective, aesthetic relationships to be established between students and literary texts.

Some of the activities presented here require more time than others, and some allow for more freedom and play than others, but they all respect the rights of literature defined in section II.<sup>5</sup> They invite students to interpret the texts in a personal way, independently from a teacher's expectations and prior interpretation of those texts. In the affective activities, there is never a single right answer, and students are often invited to share their ideas and opinions with the class so that they have the opportunity to confirm that other readers of the same text—their colleagues as well as the teacher—are not always certain of their interpretations and can also be perplexed by, or even displeased with, certain aspects of the texts while still appreciating the “specialness” of each reading and the uniqueness of each text.

Young readers are invited to put themselves in the characters' shoes, or in the author's position, as this will encourage them to get in touch with the emotions provoked by reading. It will also empower them to voice thoughts and opinions about a text with the necessary confidence. If our aim is to make students love reading literature and sharing ideas about it, the classroom should be a “safe space” rather than a place where competencies are constantly put to the test.

## NOTES

1. “Basic education” in Portugal comprises the first three study cycles, for students aged six through fifteen. The first cycle, for students aged six through nine (which we refer to as “primary school”), is the only relevant one for this study.

2. The principles, strategies, and skills listed above were taken from the document concerning fourth grade (4.º ano de escolaridade), but the guidelines for first, second, and third grades (1.º, 2.º e 3.º anos de escolaridade) also mention the need to focus on literary education by promoting a “relação afetiva e estética com a literatura.”

3. Kindergarten seems to be the only level of schooling that truly fosters affective and aesthetic relationships with literature, as it grants children the liberty to react to texts as they please as well as the space and time to just listen to literature without the demand of any reactions.

4. One primary school teacher managed to make most of her students feel immensely engaged with literature by reading to them every morning from a book whose cover, title, and author she refused to reveal until she had finished reading the whole book to them. The fact that she kept the paratext secret made most students tremendously curious about the text, and they would regularly go to the school library to try to find out which book she was reading. It is interesting to note how the paratext was felt to be a crucial part of the text because it was intentionally hidden (rather than dismissed or omitted).

5. The suggestions for “A flauta mágica” intentionally disregard right no. 3.

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SARA DE ALMEIDA LEITE has a PhD in Portuguese studies and teaches Portuguese and English language and literature at ISEC Lisboa. She has published several articles about best practices in teaching literature and books about the Portuguese language. She is chair of the postgraduate degree in storytelling at ISEC Lisboa, where she also organizes *Asas para Ler*, the annual meeting about children’s literature. She is part of the research team of IELT (NOVA University of Lisbon) and author of the fiction series *O Mundo da Inês* and *Os Mega B.A.Y.T.E.S.*, published by Porto Editora. She has also worked as a translator and illustrator.