

# Practical Experiences

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## INTERPRETATION OF SLAVKO MIHALIĆ'S LYRICAL POEM "PROLAZIM ZRINJEVCEM, DOTIČE ME MORE" AND DESIGNING THE CLASSROOM PROJECT "ZRINJEVAC"

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*Summary* – The paper presents the interpretation of Slavko Mihalić's poem "Prolazim Zrinjevcem, dotiče me more" with 8th-grade students. First, a survey about Zagreb was conducted with students, then they visited the Zagreb park Zrinjevac in order to gather impressions about it. Only afterwards was the poem interpreted in the teaching process. Finally, a project was designed and carried out during which the students became acquainted with the cultural sights of Zrinjevac and other Croatian cultural and scientific institutions and objects situated in its area.

*Key words:* Slavko Mihalić, „Prolazim Zrinjevcem, dotiče me more“, interpretation, classroom project

Lyrical poetry gives out a world of intimate experiences and messages which often surpass the scope of a student's experience and awareness.

We know that students' experiences and awareness are the starting points in the interpretation of lyrical text, and literary work in general, but we should also be aware of what those experiences and awareness mean. Students are "developing personalities" they expect that we, their teachers, help them receive and adopt messages of a literary piece. By forgetting the teacher's role in student's acceptance and discovery of the poetical message, many have equated the principle of appropriateness of a literary work with respect to student's receptive skills to the principle of appeal and in that respect we are witness to a large number of "inappropriate poetical texts which should be removed from Croatian language readers for primary school". It has occurred that a student is given poetical text

which undermines the student emotionally and intellectually. In the twenty-nine years of work in the profession, I have realized that there is not a poem, regardless of how much a student likes it at first that the student could experience and understand without the help of the teacher.

A teacher's selection of appropriate motivation for interpreting lyrical poetry is the first step in opening a student's personality towards the world of poetry. Well chosen motivation should move a student's spiritual world, i.e. ease communication with poetry.

As I was supposed to prepare eight grade students (grade 8b) for taking in Mihalić's poem "Prolazim Zrinjevcem, dotiče me more"<sup>1</sup> I opted for the experiential-awareness motivation based on students' emotional and social personal experiences within the framework of general-cultural content.

At first I conducted a written survey among the students. The survey consisted of the following questions:

1. Do you like to walk through Zagreb?
2. Which parts of the city of Zagreb are your favorite ones? Explain your answer.

Most of the pupils answered that they like to walk through Zagreb. Here are some of their answers to the second question:

*"I like every part of Zagreb, but Kvartić Square with its surroundings is my favorite. I was born there. My mother says that I used to play in a park near Kvaternik Square. That was a long, long time ago."*

*"My favorite is the Old town (Gornji grad) especially in the autumn. The leaves on the trees are golden and reddish and yellowish color which makes the houses there look older than they actually are. I like the sense of old. It is good that the Old town doesn't have much traffic."*

*"I like to go to any part of Zagreb where there is a Mc Donald's. I always eat good food there with my friends, especially when we celebrate birthdays."*

*"I enjoy going to the Zoo. I enjoy observing animals in their environment. Sometimes I imagine being a lion tamer in a Circus. The music is playing and the lions and I are proudly prancing... In the end we bow to the public which claps for a long time. "*

*"I love every part of Zagreb where there is a park. Parks are the best places for walks and rest. Everything is green, full of flowers and smells. It seems that people laugh more in parks. They are much more enjoyable than the streets. "*

The last answer served as an introduction to the classroom discussion on Zagreb parks. Most of the students mentioned Zrinjevac as the most famous and most beautiful park in Zagreb, however only seven students knew exactly how to get to the park on foot from Matko Laginja elementary school (Zagreb, Laginjina 13). I have also discovered that students knew very little about the park itself:

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<sup>1</sup> "Prolazim Zrinjevcem, dotiče me more" (Eng. „A Walk Through Zrinjevac Touching the Sea“)

several mentioned that there are concerts at Zrinjevac, and one student said that owing to his grandfather he knew that there was a meteorological station there.

Lead by prior experiences, I knew that it would be difficult to interpret Mihalić's poem by being satisfied with their answers. That is why I announced that the content of our following lesson would include a field trip to the Zrinjevac park. In agreement with teachers of Biology, Physics, History, Art, and Music we had gone to the park the following day. Students brought along cameras, voice recorders, notebooks and pencils. While walking through Zrinjevac they were supposed to take photos of famous Croatian busts, cultural institutions and the monument of Josip Juraj Strossmayer. Students also discovered the place of the once famous café Splendid. This was important for students in order to sense the poetic image of "Brod upravo pristaje uz kavanu Splendid" (Eng. "*The ship is docking at café Splendid*"). In conversation about the busts of Croatian noblemen students discovered that Ivan Ivan Mažuranić, Andrija Medulić, Julije Klović, Nikola Jurišić and Ruđer Bošković are from the Primorje area, i.e. Dalmatians who worked and created for the good of all Croatian people. Without this information students would have difficulty understanding the third verse of the poem and the basic idea of the final couplet. Impressions that Zrinjevac left on the accidental passerby Mrs. Filipa Kudrovčić (82 year old from Zagreb) were recorded on the voice recorder added to the image of this park in the first half of the twentieth century.

With the end of our field trip to Zrinjevac, students were given the following task for homework:

*"Imagination allows being at several places simultaneously, creation and fusion of landscape images in thought and wishes. Try to fuse several images of Zrinjevac with motives of other landscapes where you have experienced something nice."* (Bežen-Jambrec: Croatian reader for grade VIII of primary school).

During the following Croatian language lesson I checked students' homework. The homework served as an introduction to the reading of the poem by Mihalić "A walk through Zrinjevac, touching the sea'm walking through Zrinjevac, being touched by the sea". The following are examples of the most successful pieces of homework, marked by creativity and emotional maturity of students, and the native belonging of their parents (students' personal social experiences):

*"I am at Zrinjevac. I'm sitting on a bench under a plane tree. I'm listening to the sounds of my grandfather's tractor. I can see my grandma awaiting my tired grandfather with a big smile. I smell corn around me."*

*"A summer's night. I'm standing beside the meteorological station at Zrinjevac watching the ships sailing towards the shore. I can hear the oars hitting the billow. The blue fishing boat is leaving the harbor."*

*"I'm leaning on the fence of the Zrinjevac Pavilion. The sun is trying to break in through the plane trees. The wind from the Velebit is ruffling my loose*

*hair. I'm walking barefoot towards the creek. As I touch the cool water, I hear a tram abruptly hit the breaks."*

*"The fountains are jumping and flickering in the sun. I'm watching them from the terrace of our stone house in Primošten. I see silver waves coming from a speeding boat. People are rushing to buy fresh fish."*

Reading the homework was an excellent introduction to the poem. I did that using the following words: "We have heard how well you have fused motives of two different landscapes. Today we will hear how Slavko Mihalić, Croatian contemporary author, did that in his poem *Prolazim Zrinjevcem*, dotiče me more."

After the introduction and placement of the lyrics, I moved on to explaining some less familiar words. That was done by providing the vocabulary on an OHP transparency. On the left side of the transparency I wrote the words for which I assumed could be unknown, and on the right side I wrote the meanings of those words. The following words were explained:

Mistral (Cro. *Maestral*) – a refreshing summer wind at sea

sea storm (Cro. *Nevera*)

tide (Cro. *plima*) – elevation of the sea level which is periodically repeated according to the Moon's activities

Through conversation with the students I checked their familiarity with the meaning of these words. After they provided their explanations for the words, I revealed the explanations written on the right side of the transparency.

I then read the poem in an interpretative manner. Students were given approximately half a minute to organize their feelings upon reading the poem after which I started exploring their feelings. The majority of the students recognized joy as the basic emotion in the poem. Their explanations were supported by motives which provoke the feeling of joy:

the jubilant sky

murmur of the naked many

arrival of the ship

joy of the unhampered thought

silver lining of the leaf

This was followed by interpreting the poem. Using methods of text analysis, silent reading and loud reading, heuristic conversation and explanation students have sailed into the world of motifs and poetic imagery in the poem. As a lyrical poet shows the experience of the world and his emotions through poetic imagery shows, we have gradually entered the emotional content of each poetic image. We have also discovered rhetorical devices which portray the poetical images.

metaphor

contrast

onomatopoeia

hyperbole

epithet

paradox

allegory

Through interpretation students discovered two geographical areas which the poet unites into one sense, i.e. they discovered how the poet creates a unique area of the homeland by blending motives and poetic images.

This is how one student experienced the poetical image of “Brod upravo pristaje uz kavanu Splendid” (Eng. *The ship is docking along café Splendid*):

*“It’s summer. Zrinjevac is basking in the sun. I see a blue tram slowing down, slowly moving along the tracks and stopping next to the café Splendid. Numerous people disembark the tram and enter the café. I can hear them talking, rustling of plastic bags, laughter, sandals hitting the pavement...”*

“*Napokon se našla zagubljena stoljeća*” (Eng. *Finally the lost centuries unite*) is the last of line of the third verse of Mihalić’s poem. I will gladly cite one student’s feelings of that verse:

*“Zrinjevac park has monuments of many noble Croats who lived at different times. As the poet walks through the park he sees all our noblemen at one place. They remind him of the great moments in Croatian history.”*

This is the last couplet in the poem:

“Veliki smo milijunski brod  
koji ne kani odustati.”

(Eng. *“We are a millionaire ship  
With no intention of giving up.”*)

Students’ explanations of the basic thought contained in verses are interesting and motivating for the teacher:

*“The poet experiences Croatia as a great ship. Passengers on the ship are sailing towards their goal. They have the same goal. In that way all Croats in their country want to realize their common goal. They do not want to give in, they are determined. Perhaps the poem was composed prior to the Fatherland War, and the poet is referring to the freedom of Croatia.*

*“This couplet fills me with pride. The ship at sea can find itself in a storm, but will not give up from sailing. Croatia is a big millionaire ship, and Croatian people are its passengers. Together, they will endure all trouble.”*

*“Croatia is a big millionaire ship. There are many passengers on the ship. Great ships defeat great storms. Croatia is determined. Its people are bravely heading toward the future.”*

Moved by the successful interpretation of the poem, I decided to round off students’ feelings and awareness by a project. The aim of the project was:

*BROADEN STUDENTS' AWARENESS OF THE HISTORY OF ZRINJEVAC PARK; EXPERIENCE SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS AND THE GREAT MEN WHOSE BUSTS CAN BE SEEN AT ZRINJEVAC AS HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL LINKS BETWEEN THE COASTAL AND INLAND PARTS OF CROATIA:*

In that way I have set before myself and the students new requirements and new forms of communication. Upon defining the aim, emphasis was given on research, creativity, professional and organizational skills, that is, maximally affirm creative partnership. The definition of the project itself was a reference point:

*“A project is each rounded, integrated and complex attempt whose characteristics and aims can be defined and which has to be realized within a particular time frame thus requiring coordinated attempts of a few or more people, departments, companies, etc. “*

(Croatian encyclopedic dictionary, Novi Liber, Zagreb, 2002.)

Prior to setting the task, during Music classes students listened to operettas, marches, reveilles, waltzes and other types of music which are usually performed at Zrinjevac park. In History classes they listened about Fran Krsto Frankopan, Nikola Jurišić, J. J. Strossmayer and Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski. During Croatian language classes we read and interpreted verses of F. Krsto Frankopan and Ivan Mažuranić. We talked about the Declaration. One teaching hour of Physics was devoted to Ruđer Bošković. During Art class they were introduced with the work of Andrija Medulić and Julije Klović. Finally during Biology class, students were introduced in detail with plant varieties at Zrinjevac.

I have divided the students into six groups. Each group got a set of tasks and clearly defined deadlines within which the work was to be done. It is important to mention that a teacher has to be consistent in respecting the deadlines, otherwise anarchy and irresponsibility on the side of the students easily takes over. Each group of students got its task:

***Group A***

Gather as much data as possible about the park (the establishment of Zrinjevac, its area, plant diversity, social life at Zrinjevac)

***Group B***

Gather most important data on great Croatians (place and time of birth, their merit, names of their most important works...) whose busts can be seen at Zrinjevac

***Group C***

Gather most important data on J. J. Strossmayer (working period, his historical, cultural, religious and scientific work)

**Group D**

Most important data on the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts

**Group E**

Most important data on the Croatian Emigration Institute (Cro. *Matica hrvatska*), (with special attention given to the Declaration on the position and name of the Croatian language)

**Group F**

Most important data on the Modern gallery

Students were given appropriate literature and sources for this task. Students had three weeks to collect data. While collecting data the group leaders had to report on the results. This was followed by the, perhaps, most challenging tasks:

- analysis of the data collected with the students
- make a selection of the data collected
- extract data which correspond to particular experiences and student awareness
- elaborate with students on the less familiar and unfamiliar data
- facts which correspond to particular experiences and student awareness should be in poster form.

This part of the task involved the integration of the subject and cross-curricular relationship (Literature – Language – Linguistic expression – Media education; Music – History – Physics – Biology – Art). Students had to read all the materials students, logically relate them, summarize, select, write, copy and develop artistically and musically. All conditions for developing the project by using a PC (power point) that is for an integrated subject and cross curricular relationship have been met.

I would also like to mention the competences which students developed by doing research work in groups:

- competence in using various sources
- competence in independent reading and text comprehension
- competence in noting important data
- competence in organizing and evaluating data
- competence in creating linked text

Having in mind the fact that students' awareness in solving research task is different from scientists' in results, that is, that a student does not discover scientific truths, but uses them, it is easy to assume that students created the project on two basic levels: rational (data gathered) and emotional (personal experience of the facts). In guiding and correcting students' experiences of the less known

and unknown facts, I attempted to set a clear road for students to create clear, educational, ethical and aesthetic levels

The selection of music for the project was eased by listening to the work which used to be played at Zrinjevac (operetta, marches, reveille, waltzes...). Students could also select from chansons and compositions performed by Ivo Robić, Zvonko Špišić and Zdenka Vučković. Classical music prevailed in the project. According to the students and their experience, classical music corresponds best with the text and imagery of the project. As the eight grade student Lucija Dogan (grade 8b) had been a participant at European piano competitions and won first and third places in performing works of national and foreign authors of classical music, the students opted for her brilliant performances. As for popular music they opted for the chanson "Dva ferala" (Eng. *Two lanterns*) by Zvonko Špišić. The song was incorporated as the last musical piece in the project due to the coincidence of the refrain "Zagreb u srcu, more u duši" (Eng. *Zagreb in my heart, the sea in my soul*) and the basic thought in Mihalić's poem "Prolazim Zrinjevcem, dotiče me more".

It is important to note that students are authors of all the photographs taken for the project. The collection of artistic material for this piece was classified according to their evaluation.

Interpretation of Mihalić's poem "Prolazim Zrinjevcem, dotiče me more" inspired both the students and myself for a deeper understanding of Zrinjevac as a permanent link between the coastal and inland parts of Croatia.

In presenting their experiences, I would like to mention that students, by working in the project, became aware of meanings of unfamiliar words, expressions, concepts... They also discovered names of our artists, their role in Croatian and World cultural heritage. We will mention only a small portion of words with which they have enriched their language and their culture:

Installation	holdings
Restoration	permanent display
Florentine renaissance	ornamental
Diocese	federation
Theology	neo-Renaissance
boulevard	pavilion
arboretum	graphic art
water-color	Vladimir Becić
Ljubo Babić	Ivan Meštrović
Vlaho Bukovac	Josip Račić
Emanuel Vidović	

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*Translation from Croatian: Ivana Cindrić*