**Reading the Texts of the Anthropocene**

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**Abstract**

Analyzing empirically the responses of undergraduate students to the short stories they read in an elective English course, this paper interrogates the effect of guided reading on students’ comprehension of the reading material and compares their initial responses to the texts with those given after the lecture. The instructor of the course prepared a syllabus that mostly includes stories of the Anthropocene, theoretically the last geological era which points at excessive human control of the ecosystem. It was observed that students’ lack of knowledge about the term caused them to miss the ecological concern of the stories and make textual analysis focusing mostly on thematic characteristics. Individual reading and reading after the lecture and discussions in class revealed that guided reading questions helped students familiarize with the concept and develop new perspectives during reading. They reread the texts with a new concern about ecological collapse, environmental ethics as well as animal and plant rights. The ambiguity of the stories lies in the fact that they are neither stories of hope nor dystopian narratives, rather texts that portray the individual as the responsible agent. Therefore, re-reading the texts of the Anthropocene with the help of guided reading questions enabled students to question their own responsibility in ecological collapse and to come up with new questions as to the steps to be taken. The use of guided reading questions also made it possible for the instructor to bridge the gap between scientific accounts of the Anthropocene and literary accounts of it. Another positive outcome of the course was that the students were motivated to make ecocritical readings of classical narratives they were already familiar with in addition to readings of more recent stories.

**Key words**: Anthropocene, guided reading, ecocritical literature, non-human, active reading

**Summary 1:**

This article elaborates on the use of the active reading strategies adopted in the elective Short Stories course at a technical university in Turkey. That the course was chosen by Science students in the undergraduate level led the instructor to observe their receptions of literary texts. Surveys to understand their reading habits, warm-up questions to have an idea about how they approached a literary texts and guided reading questions to alleviate their stress to speak in public were the teaching tools used. Students were motivated to engage in peer and group work to formulate their answers both orally and in written form. Considering that standardized assessment systems in Turkey do not allow secondary and high school students to deal with anything but their exams, it is quite probable that a literature course focusing on reading texts in the lens of literary theories is a real challenge. High school and university placement exams in the country have created intense rivalry among students – as well as families – and resulted in the prioritization of science and mathematics at all levels distancing students more from literature. The difficulties they experienced in critically evaluating a literary text were examined and active reading strategies used by the instructor proved useful in developing a sense of literature. More importantly, this empirical study of reading strategies in university classroom has underlined the importance of incorporating reading strategies into literature courses taken by non-literature students.

**Summary 2:**

The syllabus of ING103I Short Stories course mostly included texts with an environmental concern. The reason behind this choice of the instructor was to raise awareness about ecological issues and question their role as responsible agents behind environmental changes. The stories were chosen from international literature and different time periods. There were also canonical texts and fairy tales in the syllabus in order to demonstrate that every single piece of literature was open to new readings. The concept of the Anthropocene both as a geological era and an environmental concept was introduced and discussed in detail. The stories read in the class helped question the human impact on the Earth and take on a less human-centered approach to works of literature. Ecocritical theory formed the theoretical background of the discussions and students were guided to reconsider Nature as a text. An empirical study of their reading experiences gave insight about how prior knowledge of a concept or a theory shaped reader expectations and the way a reader approaches a text.