

Literary Connections through Interdisciplinary Topics

Mary Helen Kashuba SSJ, *Chestnut Hill College*

Abstract

In this article teachers will find a rationale and examples for connections between literature and other disciplines, such as history, science, art, political science, philosophy, and psychology. The article addresses the goal of the Connections standard, as defined by the *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* (W-RSFL) (NSFLEP, 2015), namely, to help students expand their knowledge, engage in critical thinking, and attempt to solve problems creatively. With this goal in mind, it examines two literary avenues for making connections: first, literature in the original language, and second, literature in translation. It demonstrates connections with history, political science, and art within a language or literature course. Some examples include the question of immigration through Marie-Thérèse Coliman-Hall's short story *Bonjour Maman, Bonne fête, Maman*, [Greetings, Mama; Happy Mother's Day, Mama]; the role of colonialism in French history through the poetry of Léopold Sédar Senghor; and the question of national identity through Daudet's *La Dernière Classe* [The Last Class]. The article also addresses literature in translation through examples taken from the author's personal experience in teaching an interdisciplinary course. Among the topics are the role of memory through Bergson and Proust, and Einstein's "space-time" through Proust and Bakhtin. This topic includes folk-tales, accessible in the original and translation. Finally, the article illustrates a multi-disciplinary approach to atomic warfare through the film *Hiroshima mon amour*. It emphasizes the role of the language teacher in guiding students to make connections between language

Mary Helen Kashuba, SSJ, (DML, Middlebury) is long-time professor of French and Russian and Chair of the Foreign Language Department at Chestnut Hill College, Philadelphia, PA. She is Past President of the American Association of Teachers of French, former Board member of ACTFL and NECTFL, and current Board member of PSMILA and MLAPV. She presents regularly at professional meetings and is the author of numerous publications in professional journals and a history of Chestnut Hill College.

NECTFL Review—Special Issue, Number 80, December, 2017, pp. 77-94. © 2017 by Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.

and content disciplines, notably through the three modes of communication, and illustrates the importance of a multidisciplinary approach to problem solving and critical thinking.

Introduction

The history of language teaching has always given strong emphasis to the importance of the study of literature, as literature is one of several ways in which language comes alive while also serving as witness to time and history. Notwithstanding the importance of language as a vehicle for conversation and communication, the ability to comprehend and interpret literature was, and still sometimes is, regarded as the end product of language learning, or certainly as evidence of high-level language development. Many times, professors required students to develop lengthy literary criticisms which, though valid, did not necessarily engage those who had a scientific or practical bent. The development of the *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* (W-RSFL) (NSFLEP, 2015), however, gives a much broader dimension to language and literature. The five broad areas addressed in the W-RSFL include Culture, Communication, Connections, Communities, and Comparisons. Of these five, it is the Connections standard that is most specifically addressed in this article. The Connections standard states: “Learners build, reinforce, and expand their knowledge of other disciplines while using the language to develop critical thinking and to solve problems creatively” (p. 54). Building on this descriptor, the National Capital Language Resource Center (NCLRC, 2014), in *Teaching World Languages*, expands this statement to include “a multidisciplinary approach to learning, combining foreign language study with anything and everything else. Students should learn content through the language, and not just the language forms and vocabulary” (p. 1). One might then add that literature, as the product of language, is not an end in itself, but it has the possibility of providing connections to other disciplines.

The history of language teaching has always given strong emphasis to the importance of the study of literature, as literature is one of several ways in which language comes alive while also serving as witness to time and history.

The Connections Standard, an Overview

The Connections standard, while appreciated as essential for supporting communication and understanding in a global society, needs both reinforcement and explicit incorporation in instruction from teachers of foreign languages in order to be effective. The NCLRC (2014) reminds teachers, “Explicitly teach your students to transfer what they know across disciplines and languages and help them see they can do it” (p. 21). Students focus on their immediate assignment and often miss the relevance of what they are learning. Teachers can accomplish this goal by including thoughtfully selected literature on every level of instruction, from elementary to advanced, and even through literature in translation. This article offers pertinent examples of ways that teachers can incorporate the Connections standard into classroom instruction, both from texts in the target language

Literary Connections through Interdisciplinary Topics

as well as through literature in translation. It includes examples of interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational communication. In addition, it emphasizes the rationale for the transfer of knowledge across disciplines. In doing so, it will examine both the *how* of connections, but more than that, the *why*.

The Connections standard articulates one of the primary goals of education: “to develop critical thinking and to solve problems creatively (NSFLEP, 2015, p. 55).” Literature can provide a major contribution to this goal by helping learners identify, evaluate, and explore solutions to problems facing society today. Some literary examples include colonialism in Africa through the poetry of Léopold Sédar Senghor, whose poems can evoke parallels in history, political science, and sociology. The question of immigration, including illegal entries, can be illustrated through Marie-Thérèse Coliman-Hall’s short story, *Bonjour Maman, Bonne Fête, Maman* [Greetings, Mama; Happy Mother’s Day Mama]. Alphonse Daudet’s *La Dernière Classe* [The Last Class] illustrates an important event in European history and explores the question of national identity. Finally, on a less controversial note, art, music, and poetry can enable everyone to better understand and appreciate the beauty of the universe. Baudelaire’s *Invitation au voyage* and its parallels in great paintings afford such an opportunity for the transfer of aesthetic appreciation.

The Connections standard can also expand access for students to greater contextual understanding through literature in translation. While focusing primarily on the use of the target language, it also states: “Learners access and evaluate information and diverse perspectives that are available through the language and its cultures” (NSFLEP, 2015, p. 56). As teachers of a foreign language, we transmit not only the language but also its culture in a way that those unfamiliar with the language cannot. While the ideal still remains with the literature in its original language, the reality of today’s students points in a different direction. The number of students who reach the point at which they can understand and appreciate literature in the original language is diminishing rapidly, since most foreign language departments require only two semesters of the language. (Lusin, 2012, p. 2). The *Chronicle of Higher Education* notes a 6.7% drop in language study between 2009 and 2013 (Berner, 2015). The Modern Language Association in its 2007 report *Foreign Languages and Higher Education* has also recommended “a broader and more coherent curriculum in which language, culture and literature are taught as a continuous whole, supported by alliances with other departments and expressed through interdisciplinary courses” (par. 8). Literature has a message for today’s young people. We as language teachers can provide this and show them how literature can be incorporated into many disciplines, and why it is necessary.

Connections through Literature in Translation

An approach to literature in translation that embodies the spirit of Connections is best implemented in an interdisciplinary setting. For example, if

This article offers pertinent examples of ways that teachers can incorporate the Connections standard into classroom instruction, both from texts in the target language as well as through literature in translation.

the language teacher can partner with an expert in another content area, students stand to benefit from the knowledge of both. Several of the examples examined here come from an interdisciplinary course on “Time,” taught at Chestnut Hill College, PA. In addition to literature, the partnering content disciplines include science and psychology, illustrated through the classic *madeleine* and cup of tea in Proust’s *Swann’s Way*, from his lengthy novel *In Search of Time Past* (1956), the Alain Resnais film *Hiroshima mon amour* (1960) with its connections to the atomic bomb and its consequences, and Bakhtin’s idea of the *chronotope* (1981) as embodied in folk tales of various peoples. These are but a few examples. Through these works and others, in English or in the target language, students can use critical thinking to arrive at creative solutions to contemporary issues, such as national or individual identity, terrorism, or immigration.

Colonialism

The poetry of Léopold Sédar Senghor provides an example of literature in the original language and is accessible to students on many levels. Senghor (1906-2001) was a poet, a diplomat, and a politician. He served as President of Sénégal from 1960-1980, and led a period of transition from colonialism to independence with relative stability. He was a citizen of Sénégal as well as of France, and was the first African elected to the Académie française. His experiences as a student in France marked him profoundly, and his poetry combines images of European culture and African traditions. *Jardin de France* [*Garden of France*] compares the classic formal French garden with the uncultivated vastness of the African wilds. Senghor is called back to his native land by:

... l'appel du tam-tam
Bondissant
par monts
et
continents (Senghor, 1984, p. 223)

[...the call of the tam-tam, leaping over mountains and continents]

His poem *Femme Noire* [*Black Woman*] exalts not only the beauty of woman, but also the nobility of the African black race. Both poems are readily accessible for elementary and more advanced students, who can read and analyze them through interpretative communication guidelines. The teacher can emphasize the connections with the geography and history of West Africa, and note the role of women in traditional and modern Senegalese society.

Students might amplify these connections with further research on the poem, *Jardin de France*. Through photographs, films, and written descriptions, they could examine the formal French gardens of Versailles as well as the uncultivated deserts and tropical forests of Senghor’s native Sénégal. As an interpersonal communication activity, they could have a paired exchange; one person commenting on Versailles, and another on Sénégal. Finally, students could present the results of their research in oral or written form. Thus they would be able to solidify their comprehension of the text with their own personal research.

Literary Connections through Interdisciplinary Topics

The poem *Neige sur Paris* [*Snow over Paris*] is a little more subtle and complex, and raises issues that challenge the reader to the critical thinking and creative solution of problems noted in the Connections standard. Senghor writes it in the form of a prayer for Christmas Day. He hears the refrain of *Peace on earth*. He sees the snow covering the city:

*Vous l'avez purifié par le froid incorruptible
Par la mort blanche...
Seigneur, vous avez proposé la neige de votre paix au monde divisé ...
Voici que mon cœur fond comme neige sous le soleil.* (Senghor, 1984, p. 21)

[You have purified it (the city) by incorruptible cold
By white death...
Lord, you have proposed the snow of your peace to a divided world...
My heart melts like snow in the sun.]

Senghor calls to mind the Spanish Civil War and the divisions it produced among Nationalists and Republicans, eventually leading to the dictatorship of Franco. He recalls the evils perpetrated against his own people by those who called themselves Christian and civilized:

*Les mains blanches qui tirèrent les coups de fusils qui croulèrent les empires
Les mains qui flagellèrent les esclaves qui vous flagellèrent
Les mains blanches poudreuses qui vous giflèrent, les mains peintes poudrées qui m'ont giflé* (p. 21)

[The white hands that fired shots that brought down empires
The hands that scourged slaves, that scourged you
The white powdery hand that struck you in the face, the painted powdery hands that struck me in the face]

More specifically, he notes the hands that cut down the beautiful African forests:

*Elles abattirent la forêt noire pour en faire des traverses de chemin de fer
Elles abattirent les forêts d'Afrique pour sauver la Civilisation, parce qu'on manquait de matière première humaine.* (p. 22)

[They cut down the black forest to make railroad ties
They cut down the forests of Africa to save Civilization, because they did not have human material.]

Senghor ends with the refrain that indicates how his heart melts like the snow under the sun of Christmas Day, under the sun of the Lord's gentleness,

*Mon cœur, Seigneur, s'est fondu comme neige sur les toits de Paris
Au soleil de votre douceur* (p. 22)

[My heart, Lord, has melted like snow on the roofs of Paris
In the sun of your gentleness]

One might also see this as symbolizing a desire for forgiveness of the injustices done to Senghor's people. He expresses the paradox of colonialism: on the one hand, suppression of the native culture; on the other hand, the gift of language and education, as seen in the beauty of the French language found in the poem. Ironically, Senghor was able to receive his training in France and denounce colonial abuses through poetry, because of the French presence in Sénégal.

Students might begin with guidance from the teacher through the interpretive phase of communication so that they might appreciate the points noted above. An interpersonal discussion could address the implications of colonialism and the effects it has had on today's society. After some research appropriate to their level, students could follow up with an essay or presentation on the historical and political factors underlying colonialism, more specifically in Sénégal, considering its impact on individuals and on identity. Students can enrich their knowledge through what they have learned in history or political science, or bring their literary knowledge to these disciplines.

Immigration

Colonialism has far-reaching effects. Haiti is an example of a country that suffered from exploitation by foreign powers, as illustrated in *Bonjour, Maman, Bonne Fête, Maman* [Greetings, Mama; Happy Mother's Day, Mama]. The author, Marie-Thérèse Coliman-Hall (1918-1997) was a native Haitian who, like Senghor, received a good education both in her native country and in France. She became a pioneer of pre-school education in Haiti, and wrote plays, short stories, and school books. In 1975, she received the literary award France-Haiti (Prix Littéraire France-Haïti). Much of her work comes from a feminist and human rights perspective.

The short story *Bonjour, Maman, Bonne Fête, Maman*, is set in a boarding school in Haiti. As students learning French read this story, the teacher can help them note important points. Dolcina, a fourteen-year-old girl, is told to write a Mother's Day letter to the mother she never knew. Rebellious, she refuses, yet begins to write, and in the process, imagines the life of her parents "là-bas" [over there], a life of ease, comfort, and prosperity. Her teacher has told her the contrary, but she refuses to believe it. Dolcina has learned from her grandmother that the parents lost everything in a disastrous hurricane followed by floods when she was only eight months old. They departed in a small boat, leaving her with her grandmother. Dolcina anticipates her reunion with her parents and a life of ease with them. The reader surmises that the parents are illegal immigrants, and hence cannot return or be reunited with her. Dolcina ends her letter with the simple message, "*Bonjour, maman, bonne fête, maman*" (Coliman-Hall, 2015).

After an interpretive reading of the story, students can discuss in pairs or small groups the conditions in an already poor country after a natural disaster. First a drought, then crop failure, then loss of livestock, and finally floods devastated the region. Students might include research on the background of such disasters, including deforestation which led to landslides and loss of life. They might note that these events occur all too frequently today as they did when the story was first published in 1979. They can also discuss the difficult circumstances facing the

Literary Connections through Interdisciplinary Topics

immigrants in a new country, presumably the United States. The father works as a valet in a hotel, and the mother as a housekeeper in several homes. They can barely support their four children, born in America, who have American names: Eddy, Betty, Jeff, and Daisy, in an effort toward assimilation.

A useful assignment for students in the form of presentational communication is a response to the letter. They might imagine that the mother (or father) received it, and will answer it, based on the information contained in Dolcina's letter. A sampling of responses from such an assignment reveals sympathy for both Dolcina and her parents. In most cases, students showed understanding of the illegal immigrant situation and the difficulties it poses to both immigrants and their children. The response to these problems remains controversial, but students need to be aware of the personal conflicts involved, and explore eventual solutions. They can bring examples of this story to other courses, such as Sociology and Human Services, or Psychology, or conversely, enrich their essay by what they have already learned in these disciplines.

Immigration Statistics

In order to enrich discussions or presentations on the issue of immigration, students can consult census reports that are easily accessible. Recent French statistics are available through INSEE, *Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques* (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies). Tables make the assignment applicable to first-year students, who can identify countries and numbers. Intermediate students can find further information through the text. Because immigration became a vital issue in France's electoral campaign, and since immigration to the United States has assumed equal importance, students should be knowledgeable in this area. US statistics are available at the Center for Immigration Studies (Camarota & Zeigler, 2016). While only documented immigrants are included, the country of origin and level of English language ability is interesting to bring to students' attention. Such statistics can reinforce written or oral work on Coliman-Hall's short story and others like it, by supporting fictional works with factual information.

National Identity

Much literature requires historical knowledge in order to appreciate it fully. Connections between language study and history might be represented through Alphonse Daudet's short story, *La Dernière Classe* [*The Last Class*] (1873). If students do not know the events of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, they can learn them while also coming to appreciate the situation described by Daudet. In fact, the historical connections of this piece of literature are deep seated. The roots of this conflict actually go back to Charlemagne's Empire of the year 800, the forerunner of today's European Union. Its division in 843 finds echoes in the disputed area of Alsace-Lorraine, which passed into German rule in 1870. Frantz, a young Alsatian who preferred to roam the fields rather than sit in a school room, is surprised to find the classroom

Much literature requires historical knowledge in order to appreciate it fully.

occupied not only by the children, but also by the elders of the village. They have come to attend the last class in French. Tomorrow the village, the province, the people, will pass over into German hands. Tomorrow's lesson will be in German. The schoolmaster leaves them with the admonition that they maintain their language and their culture, and thus preserve their identity (Daudet, 1930, p. 19).

Students on the intermediate level or higher can easily appreciate the simplicity of this story. While the history it involves makes an obvious connection, students can extend their understanding beyond both history and literature. As an interpersonal activity, students might discuss the issue of national identity, and the role played by language and culture. They might begin with the story. How will the children and the villagers feel tomorrow, when they have to speak German? How would you feel if you could no longer speak English (or your own native language, if you came to the United States as an immigrant)? As an essay or a presentation, students might explore the question: How does the language imposed by the conqueror affect the spirit of the people? Examples such as the imposition of Russian on the republics and satellites of the former Soviet Union, or the role of English and French in Africa can provide topics. How does a nation preserve its identity? How can it recover after losing it? In Poland, Ukraine, and Lithuania, national poets such as Adam Mickiewicz reappeared. In France, the image of Jeanne d'Arc re-emerged after 1870, as a motivation for national unity. In Africa, Senghor's poetry returns to the tam-tam, the dance, and nature. What other examples can students offer, and what is the result? They might choose one of these countries based on their national origin, and thus enrich the class by experiences in diversity. Thus, the Connections standard involves not only language and other disciplines, but critical thinking and problem solving as well.

...the Connections standard involves not only language and other disciplines, but critical thinking and problem solving as well.

Poetry and Art

While critical thinking and problem solving are important phases of education in all disciplines, students should be aware that literature is also an art form. Charles Baudelaire expresses this in a unique way in his poetry. An easily accessible work is his *Invitation au Voyage* [*Invitation to the Voyage*]. Baudelaire himself was a connoisseur of art and wrote numerous commentaries on the Paris *salons*. Students can make connections between art and poetry by examining this poem, as well as others. While he wrote *Invitation* as a love poem, it also affords multiple connections with art, throughout the work and in its refrain:

*Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,
Luxe, calme, et volupté.* (Baudelaire, 1975, p. 51)

[There everything is only order and beauty,
Luxury, calm, and pleasure.]

The refrain quoted above inspired artist Henri Matisse, who entitled his work *Luxe, calme, et volupté* [*Luxury, calm, and pleasure*], painted in 1904. In it, he portrays the same dream atmosphere as Baudelaire in a sketch of bathers by the sea,

Literary Connections through Interdisciplinary Topics

with evocative colors and an exotic landscape. Students at the intermediate level and beyond can easily describe the simple sketch and its colors. This can be part of the interpretive reading, as well as the interpersonal communicative activity.

Other sections of the poem offer opportunities for paired or group interpersonal activities. The first stanza addresses the woman as a child and a sister “*Mon enfant, ma sœur*,” and speaks of the misty suns (“*soleils mouillés*”) as it extends the invitation to a sea voyage. Salomon van Ruysdael’s, *Lagune avec un voilier* (1660) [*Lagoon with a Sailboat*] corresponds well with the images created by Baudelaire. The second stanza of the poem reflects the interior of the house to which Baudelaire invites his guest:

*Des meubles luisants,
Polis par les ans,
Décoreraient notre chambre;
Les riches plafonds,
Les miroirs profonds,
La splendeur orientale...* (Baudelaire, 1975, p. 51)

[Shining furniture
Polished by the years
Would decorate our room;
Rich ceilings,
Deep mirrors,
Oriental splendor...]

Johannes Vermeer’s, *Girl Reading a Letter by an Open Window* (1657-1659), reflects the shining wood polished by time and evokes a rich interior. This section, along with the painting, could also be used to complement a lesson on the home and furniture.

The sunset in the final stanza can be illustrated by Claude Lorraine’s, *Port de mer au coucher du soleil* [*Seaport at sunset*] (1643):

*Les soleils couchants
Revêtent les champs,
Les canaux, la ville entière
D’hyacinthe et or...
Tout s’endort...* (p. 51)

[The setting suns
Clothe the fields,
The canals, the whole city
In hyacinth and gold...
All begins to slumber...]

The artist’s blues and gold and the setting sun on the seaport evoke the atmosphere of peace and rest which the poet wished to transmit to his readers. Students might describe the atmosphere of the poem and the painting.

As students make the connections between poetry and art, they may begin to appreciate other works of Baudelaire and find suitable paintings that capture

the same sentiments. They are not to illustrate the poem, but rather to capture its impression, and learn to make the “*correspondances*” that Baudelaire outlined in his famous poem by the same name. Some further suggestions include Baudelaire’s *Parfum exotique* [Exotic Perfume], for which Paul Gaughin’s lush *Paysage martiniquais*, [Landscape in Martinique] (1887), can provide a tropical image, and his *Bords de mer* [Seashores] (1887), which echoes the sailors’ songs that transport Baudelaire to another land. As a presentational activity, students might read the poetry, show the paintings, and add music appropriate to the poem. This could involve several students, featuring artists and musicians among them.

Literature in Translation

The goal of critical thinking leads to the question of literature in translation. We have already noted its role in the implementation of the Connections standard, which invites the learner “to access and *evaluate information and diverse perspectives* that are available through the language and its cultures” (NSFLEP, 2015, p. 56). Learners who are unable to read the material in the original can indeed have access to it through the intervention of the teacher. A person trained in the literature and culture of one or several other languages is best qualified to lead students to their own evaluation of the diverse perspectives the target culture offers, and to help learners make the connections.

Memory

Another example of Connections might occur for students of psychology who could explore the role of memory in human development. They may have heard of Proust and the famous madeleine. Perhaps they have not read the text, which can be rather daunting in any language with its lengthy sentences and frequent abstractions. Proust’s contemporary, Henri Bergson, composed an influential work *Matière et Mémoire* [Matter and Memory], in 1896, which states scientifically as well as philosophically many of Proust’s literary observations. Bergson (1912) provides a basis for Proust’s rejection of voluntary memory: “The process of localizing a recollection in the past, for instance, cannot at all consist, as has been said, in plunging into the mass of our memories as into a bag, to draw out memories, closer and closer to each other, between which the memory to be localized may find its place” (p. 223). He indicates what Proust noted when he drank the cup of tea and ate the madeleine: “But on the lower planes these memories await, so to speak, the dominant image to which they may be fastened. A sharp shock, a violent emotion, forms the decisive event to which they cling” (p. 224).

Proust (1956) records his experience:

And I begin again to ask myself what it could have been, this unremembered state which brought with it no logical proof of its existence, but only the sense that it was a happy, that it was a real state in whose presence other states of consciousness melted and vanished. I decide to attempt to make it reappear. I retrace my thoughts to the moment at which I drank the first spoonful of tea. I find again the same state, illumined by no fresh light. (p. 63)

Literary Connections through Interdisciplinary Topics

He reflects further:

But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, still, alone, more fragile, but with more vitality, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, the smell and taste of things remain poised a long time, like souls, ready to remind us, waiting and hoping for their moment, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unfaltering, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection. (p. 65)

In order to appreciate Proust's sensations and Bergson's philosophy, one must not only examine the content of the writing, but the time and place in which they were written. Proust's isolated childhood, his attachment to his mother, his aunt's home in Illiers-Combray, all combine to form the cultural background. Bergson struggled with the nature of memory, trying to demonstrate that it was spiritual rather than material, contrary to current philosophies. While students may learn about both of these authors in other classes, they can best make the appropriate connections through the aid of a teacher proficient in the language and literature. They can also appreciate the affinities between literature, philosophy, and psychology, which otherwise they may not have seen. Although not a foreign language assignment, these readings can follow the model of interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational communication. Students will need guidance to interpret the readings. They can discuss the passages cited above, and other pertinent pages. They can then give a presentation comparing Bergson's "cone of memory" and Proust's "*madeleine*."

The Fourth Dimension

Surprisingly, Proust also speaks to the scientist, through affinities that he shares with Albert Einstein. In 1915, Einstein published his theory of general relativity and the notion of space-time with its four dimensions. While it is impossible to illustrate space-time because our minds cannot think in four dimensions, Proust has described it in artistic terms. He speaks of Combray, the people, Tante Léonie's house, and finally the church:

...all these things made of the church for me something entirely different from the rest of the town; *a building which occupied, so to speak, four dimensions of space—the name of the fourth being Time*—which had sailed the centuries with that old nave, where bay after bay, chapel after chapel, seemed to stretch across and hold down and conquer not merely a few yards of soil, but each successive epoch from which the whole building had emerged triumphant,.... (Proust, 1956, pp. 84-85)

The church is a building with length, breadth, height, but also *time*. Without the fourth dimension it could not exist. It has stood through the ages and its stone walls have witnessed generations of men and women who have passed through its portals. Students can often relate similar experiences if they have traveled abroad or visited ancient historical monuments. Once again, scientists can study Einstein and world literature classes can read Proust, but the essential aspect is the

connection, which students may not have seen without the juxtaposition of the two disciplines.

Proust was not unique in exploring the concept of space-time in literature. Another was Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), the Russian philosopher, literary critic, semiotician and scholar who worked on literary theory, ethics, and the philosophy of language. He invented the term “chronotope” to describe the relation of space and time in literature. He defines it thus:

We will give the name chronotope (literally, “time space”) to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. This term [space-time] is employed in mathematics, and was introduced as part of Einstein’s Theory of Relativity. . . . We are borrowing it for literary criticism almost as a metaphor (almost, but not entirely). What counts for us is the fact that it expresses the inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space). We understand the chronotope as a formally constitutive category of literature. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 84)

Bakhtin notes the role of space-time in folklore, stating that “Folkloric man demands space and time for his full realization; he exists entirely and fully in these dimensions and feels comfortable in them. Therefore, the fantastic in folklore is a realistic fantastic: in no way does it exceed the limits of the real, here-and-now material world” (pp. 150-151). An idealistic world with a fixed eschatology, for Bakhtin, is based in the present and the past, and has a vertical timeline, since it does not have an open future. He cites Dante’s *Divine Comedy* as a classic example of the fixed world. The folkloric world, on the other hand, deals with the here and now, and operates on a horizontal timeline with options for the future. Thus, by exploring folktales, students can make the connections between literature and space-time.

Folktales

Through folktales, students can also make powerful connections by going back to the primitive origins of humankind. Researchers use scientific methods to determine their age, which may be pertinent to students of science and anthropology. Durham University anthropologist Tehrani (Graça da Silva & Tehrani, 2016) claims that *Jack and the Beanstalk* was rooted in a group of stories classified as “The Boy Who Stole Ogre’s Treasure,” (p. 7) and could be traced back to the time when Eastern and Western Indo-European languages split more than 5,000 years ago. He and Graça da Silva used phylogenetic comparative methods to document their findings. In a 2016 article they state, “[*Beauty and the Beast* and *Rumpelstiltskin*] can be securely traced back to the emergence of the major western Indo-European subfamilies as distinct lineages between 2500 and 6000 years ago and may have even been present in the last common ancestor of Western Indo-European languages” (p. 8). They also trace the story of the smith and the devil, one of the oldest known, back

Literary Connections through Interdisciplinary Topics

to the Bronze Age. While this science is in its infancy, Tehrani and Graça da Silva do not dismiss “research into tale types and motifs in Graeco-Roman, Germanic and Celtic mythology (which) support the antiquity of many of the magic tales that were reconstructed in ancestral Indo-European populations” (p. 9). A further exploration of these rich data can provide material for presentational communication, both oral and written.

The world of folklore with its ancient roots offers many opportunities for connections. Students can read the stories in their target language or in translation. Simplified versions are available for less advanced students. More literary options, such as those by Perrault in French, the Brothers Grimm in German, or Afanasiev in Russian, will be suitable for advanced students. Not only do folk tales connect with science such as the space-time principle, or phylogenetic research; the actual stories will promote discussion of topics that are relevant to today’s society, such as child-abuse, discrimination, or identity theft. Modern nations whose independence was suppressed, notably those subsumed by the Soviet Union, have used folklore to assert their identity. This can provide interpersonal communication in pairs or small groups, in the target or native language, depending on the context of the lesson.

The story of Rumpelstiltskin tells of the greediness and abuse of a king toward an unsuspecting young woman. Students can find many parallels in history and political science. Graça da Silva and Tehrani’s recent evidence points to the probability of such a story 4000 years ago, so the greed of those in authority is not new! In the many strikingly similar stories of *Rumpelstiltskin*, we also meet a parent who makes exaggerated claims about the child’s talents. Not too unusual—parents often either overestimate or underestimate their offspring. Hansel and Gretel’s parents, in an opposite situation, left no room for the initiative of their children, either out of fear for their own survival or cruelty towards their children. The miller is a braggart who places his fame above his child’s welfare. We also meet a greedy king or prince, who demands an impossible task and who threatens death if the victim does not complete it. Indeed rulers often overtax their poorest subjects and seemingly try to extract gold from straw. More advanced students, or those with a creative bent, might undertake the presentational task of a modern fairy tale with the same or similar themes.

In *Rumpelstiltskin*, the donor or helper does not meet with a reward, as is common according to Vladimir Propp’s (1928) characterization of a folk-tale (p. 23), but is rather the victim of identity theft. Among primitive peoples and throughout the Middle Ages, one’s name was the equivalent of one’s identity. To know the name of a person meant to have power over him or her. The heroine in this cycle is a victim of her father’s and the king’s greed, and she is in a vulnerable if not desperate situation. She must gain power over him by learning his name. This she does, and he disappears, sometimes splitting himself in two, and sometimes simply flying out the window. As Zipes (2010) notes, once we name the forces that threaten us we gain control over them and they all but disappear.

This analysis of personality can provide connections with psychology, among other disciplines. Stories such as *Cinderella* and *Hansel and Gretel*, common to most European and some Asian cultures, can provide connections to many disciplines

and invite students to critical thinking and problem solving. In addition, different versions reflect variations in the societies which have formulated them, leading to a study of anthropology and cultural comparisons. If students read these stories in the original or in translation, they can engage in paired or group discussion on such themes as child abuse, parental responsibility, or sibling rivalry. Presentational communication topics can address the variations in the stories according to the societies in which they are found. For example, one might explore the role of the shoe in *Cinderella*, not found in the Asian versions!

Film

Finally, we can use film to establish connections between disciplines. Marguerite Duras' and Alain Resnais' classic *Hiroshima mon amour* [*Hiroshima my love*] (1959) appeals to science through the construction of the atomic bomb, to psychology with its evocation of memory, and to history with its basis in the Second World War. In addition, the technique of cinematography so carefully orchestrated in the film adds another dimension to its artistic and literary quality. The two actors, a nameless man and woman, speak in short, clipped phrases easily comprehensible in the original or through subtitles. The stark black and white of the film evokes the horrors of war and the mysterious role of memory.

The historic moment that begins the drama is August 7, 1945, when the atomic bomb fell on Hiroshima. It expands into the effects of the bomb: destruction, death, physical deformities, not to mention mental anguish. All this is juxtaposed with an artistically crafted image of love-making between a Japanese man and a French woman in August of 1957, when she has come to Hiroshima as an actress in a documentary for peace. He insists that she has seen nothing of the fateful day; she maintains the contrary:

Lui : Tu n'as rien vu à Hiroshima. Rien.

Elle : J'ai tout vu. Tout... Ainsi l'hôpital je l'ai vu. J'en suis sûre. L'hôpital existe à Hiroshima. Comment aurais-je pu éviter de le voir ?

Lui : Tu n'as pas vu d'hôpital à Hiroshima. Tu n'as rien vu à Hiroshima...

Elle : Je n'ai rien inventé.

Lui : Tu as tout inventé. ...

Elle : Rien. De même que dans l'amour cette illusion existe, cette illusion de pouvoir ne jamais oublier, de même j'ai eu l'illusion devant Hiroshima que jamais je n'oublierai. De même que dans l'amour.
(Duras & Resnais, 1991, pp. 22-23; 28)

[He: You saw nothing at Hiroshima. Nothing.

She: I saw everything. Everything... Even the hospital, I saw it. I am certain. There is a hospital at Hiroshima. How could I miss seeing it?

He: You didn't see any hospital at Hiroshima. You saw nothing at Hiroshima....

Literary Connections through Interdisciplinary Topics

She: I invented nothing.

He: You invented everything.

She: Nothing. Just as this illusion exists in love, this illusion of never being able to forget, I also had this illusion that I will never forget Hiroshima. Just like in love.]

As the drama unfolds, the viewer learns the woman's personal story of her romantic involvement with a German soldier, his death, and her punishment. In fact, through memory, she is able to "see" what the Japanese man has experienced, and both are transposed and connected to the past in this present moment of union.

While the first atomic bomb was constructed in utmost secrecy, the scientific theory behind it is readily accessible. In fact, students will learn it in their physics classes. They can read a summary of the Manhattan Project and view contemporary art related to the events in Gamwell's (2002) *Exploring the Invisible*. The art work of Newman and Rothko is particularly expressive (Gamwell, 2002, pp. 270-271). The text, the paintings, and the film provide obvious connections. They also address the moral issues involved in the use of nuclear armaments. As Cohen (1995-1996) observes, "Continuity in this world of nuclear armament, in other words, requires two things: assumption of guilt for the massive destruction and the waste of human life, and complete identification with the object of mourning. In this sense, *Hiroshima mon amour* is a monument not simply to memory, but to active, responsible, historical remembering" (p. 182).

Conclusion

When making connections between literature, in the target language or in translation, and other disciplines, it is the student who must see the link. The teacher may act as a catalyst, but it is only if the student actively participates that the required result will occur. Although an interdisciplinary situation is the ideal, any teacher of the target language can invite connections. The teacher does not have to be an expert in any of the disciplines we have discussed. The student can use material from other courses, or do the research individually. Students who may be less gifted in literature and language may be invited to bring their knowledge of other disciplines into the class and share them with others, thus giving them a larger portion of ownership and enabling them to gain a greater sense of accomplishment.

By consciously aligning the study of a target language's literature with the Connections standard, the teacher is drawn to think of the linkages across disciplines and making them visible to the student, thus expanding the power of language learning beyond conversation. Connections enhance the power of language and literature. It puts these content areas on a par with science, history, art, psychology, anthropology, and other disciplines.

When making connections between literature, in the target language or in translation, and other disciplines, it is the student who must see the link. The teacher may act as a catalyst, but it is only if the student actively participates that the required result will occur.

NECTFL Review 80—Special Issue

Knowledge need not be compartmentalized, but rather expanded to include as many areas as possible. Interdisciplinary studies are becoming increasingly more popular. Literature and the arts fit well into any such program. By emphasizing the power of language and literature from the beginning courses, perhaps by a short poem such as Senghor's *Jardin de France*, students may learn to see connections between the language they are studying and another world with its natural beauty that has undergone the ravages of conquest and the struggles for independence.

Literature in translation can provide a window into the target culture and its language. The teacher who knows the language can explain the use of certain terms, share the original for particularly meaningful expressions, and even use a few words in the target language. In some cases, this may motivate the student to learn the language, or continue with it. In others, it will promote respect for the language and the target culture, especially if the student sees the literature in relation to other areas.

Students tend to think in isolated and compartmentalized segments. Making connections between literature and other disciplines will help them to see a fuller picture, if not the complete one. No one discipline will bring a solution to the problems we face as a society, but a combination of them will offer a better alternative. One can see a more accurate picture of the danger of nuclear weapons by looking at them through the lens of film in *Hiroshima mon amour*, science in the construction of the bomb, history in the actual events and their consequences, art in their figurative representation, and psychology in the role of memory. If we teach our students to think globally, approaching an issue through as many avenues as possible, we will have made an important contribution to education. We will approach the goal of the *Connections* standard, where we use the language and its culture to help learners think critically and solve problems creatively.

References

- Bakhtin, M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays*. In M. Holquist, Ed. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Baudelaire, C. (1975). *Œuvres complètes. Baudelaire*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Berner, M. (2015) Foreign-language enrollments drop after years of increases. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.chronicle.com/article/Foreign-Language-Enrollments/189913/>
- Bergson, H., & Palmer, W. (1912). *Matter and memory* (N. Paul, Trans.). London: G. Allen.
- Brutel, C. (2014). *Les immigrés récemment arrivés en France*. Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques. Retrieved from: <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/1281393>
- Camarota S., & Zeigler, K. (2016). *Immigrants in the United States*. Center for Immigration Studies. Retrieved from https://cis.org/Immigrants-United-States?gclid=CjwKEAiA48fDBRDJ24_Ar0M5kNnp1uQc7_144t5AidCzBStVdpRy15vZh8Gfhv22SfRoCzLTw_wcB

Literary Connections through Interdisciplinary Topics

- Cohen, K. (1995-1996). *Hiroshima mon amour: A monument to the pleasurable pangs of memory and desire*. Discursos: Estudos de Língua e Cultura Portuguesa. ISSN 0872-0738. N° 11-12 pp. 161-188. <http://hdl.handle.net/10400.2/4034>.
- Coliman-Hall, M. (2015). *Bonjour Maman, Bonne fête, Maman*. Originally published 1979, Port-au-Prince : Éditions du Soleil, pp. 137-145. Retrieved from <http://ile-en-ile.org/marie-therese-colimon-hall-bonjour-maman-bonne-fete-maman/>
- Daudet, A. (1930). *Contes du lundi*. Paris: Nelson.
- Duras, M., & Resnais, A. (1991). *Hiroshima mon amour : Scénario et dialogue* (Collection folio, 9). Paris: Gallimard.
- Einstein, A. (1920). *Relativity: The special and general theory*. (R. Lawson, trans.). New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Gamwell, L. (2002). *Exploring the Invisible*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Gelée, C. Lorrain. (1639). *Port de mer au soleil couchant [Seaport at sunset]*. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:F0087_Louvre_Gellee_port_au_soleil_couchant-_INV4715_rwk.jpg?uselang=fr
- Graça da Silva S., & Tehrani, J. J. (2016) Comparative phylogenetic analyses uncover the ancient roots of Indo-European folktales. *Royal Society open science* 3:150645. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1098/rsos.150645>
- Gauguin, P. (1887). *Tropical landscape, Martinique*. Lenbachhaus, Munich, Germany. Retrieved from: <https://www.wikiart.org/en/paul-gauguin/tropical-landscape-martinique-1887>
- Geisler, M., et al. (2007). *Foreign languages and higher education: New structures for a changed world*. Modern Language Association (MLA). Retrieved from <https://www.mla.org/Resources/Research/Surveys-Reports-and-Other-Documents/Teaching-Enrollments-and-Programs/Foreign-Languages-and-Higher-Education-New-Structures-for-a-Changed-World>
- Lusin, N. (2012). *The MLA survey of postsecondary entrance and degree requirements for languages other than English, 2009–10*. Retrieved from https://www.mla.org/content/download/3316/81618/requirements_survey_200910.pdf
- Matisse, H. (1904). *Luxe, calme et volupté* [*Luxury, calm and pleasure*]. Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Retrieved from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Matisse-Luxe.jpg>
- Modern Language Association. (2017). *Language enrollment database (1958-2013)*. Retrieved from https://apps.mla.org/flsurvey_search
- NationalCapitalLanguageResourceCenter.(2014). *TeachingWorldLanguages:APracticalGuide*. Retrieved from <http://www.nclrc.org/TeachingWorldLanguages/chap10-connections.pdf>
- National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (NSFLEP). (2015). *World-readiness standards for learning languages (W-RSLL)*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Propp, V. (1928). *Morphology of the folk tale*. The American Folklore Society and Indiana University. Translation ©1968. Retrieved from <http://homes.di.unimi.it/~alberti/Mm10/doc/propp.pdf>

NECTFL Review 80—Special Issue

- Proust, M. (1956). *Swann's way* (C. Scott-Moncrieff, Trans.). New York: Modern Library.
- Senghor, L. (1984). *Poèmes*. Paris: Editions du Seuil.
- van Ruysdael, S. (1660). *Lagune avec un voilier* [*Lagoon with a ship*]. Gemäldegalerie, Berlin. Retrieved from https://wikimonde.com/article/Salomon_Van_Ruysdael
- Vermeer, J. (1657–1659). *Girl reading a letter at an open window*. Gemäldegalerie, Dresden. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Girl_Reading_a_Letter_at_an_Open_Window
- Zipes, J. (April 14, 2010). *Utopian tendencies of oddly odern fairy tales*. University of British Columbia. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com>