

Editorial: Literature and Philosophy in Schools

This is the second of two Special Issues focused on 'Literature and Philosophy in Schools'. The topic attracted many submissions. The first Special Issue came out in December 2024, and contained eight articles. This Special Issue contains six articles.

The questions we posed in the Call for Papers were these: 'Why study literature in schools? What special benefits come with an education in literature? What might students be missing if they bypass literature?' We put these question to an AI program (Gemini) and got the following response:

The special benefits of studying literature are

- **Enhanced empathy and understanding:** Literature allows students to step into the shoes of diverse characters from different backgrounds, cultures, and time periods. This fosters tolerance and compassion, crucial for navigating an increasingly interconnected world.
- **Sharpened critical thinking and analytical skills:** Analyzing literary texts requires students to think deeply, interpret symbolism, identify themes, and evaluate arguments. These critical thinking skills are transferable to all aspects of life, from academic pursuits to professional careers and personal decision-making.
- **Improved communication skills:** Exposure to rich vocabulary, diverse writing styles, and complex sentence structures enhances students' language proficiency. Through reading and discussing literature, they become more articulate, both in their writing and speaking.
- **Development of cultural literacy and historical awareness:** Literature acts as a mirror to society, reflecting its values, beliefs, and challenges across different eras and cultures. This cultural literacy broadens their worldview and helps them understand the forces that have shaped the present.
- **Boosted creativity and imagination:** Literature introduces students to imaginative worlds, unique characters, and innovative storytelling techniques. This exposure can spark their own creativity, encouraging them to think outside the box, generate new ideas, and develop their own narrative abilities.

Very likely, these five would be widely endorsed as the expected benefits of studying literature. What is not well understood is the role that skills in philosophy might have in bringing those benefits to fruition. The essays in this and the previous Special Issue are largely focused on that point.

In the first paper, 'Imagination, ethics, and epistemic inquiry: Why teaching literature and film in the philosophy classroom matters', Aleksandra Hernandez from the United States reflects on her experience as a college professor in philosophy and literature. She draws on 'the resources of American pragmatism to argue that incorporating collective engagement with literature and film in the philosophy classroom has the potential to open up lines of inquiry that would otherwise remain unexplored, and to shed light on and deepen their moral and epistemic commitments'. In her view, 'collective inquiry into the meaning of artistic works creates a feedback loop between theory and practice, in which students' personal experiences and collective engagements with art bolster their epistemic agency'. She describes classroom discussions that illustrate her argument.

Two founders of the philosophy in schools movement, Ann Margaret Sharp and Matthew Lipman, were strong advocates for approaching philosophy through literature, and wrote specially designed novels and stories for that purpose. In the second essay, 'Young people's dystopian novels as a laboratory for philosophical thought', Charlie Renard of France offers an argument dissenting from the Lipman and Sharp approach. She asks: 'What makes a book thought-provoking? In my view, it is neither the theme, the author, nor the deliberate inclusion of philosophical ideas'. 'Only text that contains ambiguity and complexity that encourages interpretative autonomy and that, because of its literary specificities, requires a special effort on the part of the reader, is thought-provoking'. She develops her argument using examples from teenager classroom discussion of dystopian literature.

The third paper, 'Non-canonical philosophy and Cordel literature in schools', goes to Brazilian folk poetry for inspiration and example. The authors, Nikki Rotas and Filipe Malafaia Cerqueira, both from Canada, seek to introduce non-Western literary traditions into the discussion. Like Renard, they criticise the predominant Lipman approach, which they see as having been 'focused exclusively on children's reasoning and argumentation skills while largely neglecting affect or emotion'. They see Cordel literature as offering an alternative. They say: 'Cordel stories tackle complex societal issues through the artistry of language, which takes shape in many forms'. It is a literature of affect and emotion, addressing 'philosophical topics such as love and loss,

and truth and beauty'. Literature in the classroom, they say, 'must matter to the child'. They make the case that Cordel literature, with its 'evocative imagery and poignant reflections', will do this.

Ben Schermbrucker, a teacher in Malta, tackles the topic of 'Philosophy and the representation of literary works in high school essays'. He is interested in how 'literary texts ought to be represented in curriculum-based high school assessment tasks'. These tasks mostly take the form of essays in which literary works must be viewed as complex, strongly patterned texts. Ideally, this results in essays in which an author's use of language reveals a sustained, multifaceted engagement with a particular set of authorial concerns. And yet, despite this focus, virtually all school curricula neglect the underlying genesis and nature of such complex patterns'. He looks at examples of assessment tasks from five education systems, in all of which the task is 'deeply representational'. A good essay will pick up on the complex associations of words and ideas in (his example) a passage from Shakespeare's *MacBeth*. He outlines five ways this might be tackled. He concludes by showing the relevance of these issues to high school teaching.

In the fifth essay, Joana Rita Sousa discusses the use of picture books and illustrated books as tools for fostering philosophical inquiry in the classroom. She draws on her experience as a teacher in Portuguese schools. In her role, she says, 'I need resources that can capture the children's attention in the first few minutes. Picture books, illustrated books, images and even games have proven to be truly engaging, as they draw children's attention to visuals and/or cultivate a playful environment'. She discusses in particular two Portuguese books, *¿Hay Alguien Ahí? (Is there anybody out there?)* and *Discórdia (Disagreement)*, which serve as 'questioning books'. Facilitators using books like these can learn to be 'comfortable with uncertainty' and to trust the group to develop what she calls 'philosophyness'.

The last essay is by the editors of these Special Issues, Alan Tapper and Raymond Driehuis of Australia. Their topic is 'Literature as machines for thinking', a phrase they take from the critic IA Richards. They argue first against the Romantic assumption that literature, just by itself, has special humanising powers. Literature is a highly diverse phenomenon; some of it may be propaganda for bad causes. A better assumption is that literature is for discussion. 'Engagement in this process [of discussion] is educative. Its educational value is that it generates alertness to the debatable concepts and practices that structure our lives. In this it is like philosophy'. The authors try to show how 'a philosophical pedagogy fits well with literary study'.

They see the literature curriculum as having ‘three main components: textual analysis; the study of values and attitudes in stories; and its impact on the reader critically considered’. They consider the third as the most important. But, this being so, the study of literature must involve open and critical discussion of the sort in which philosophy specialises.

Also included in this issue are two book reviews. The first, by Terry Lovat, reviews Olha Sukhomlynska’s compilation of stories her father, the educator and author Vasyl Sukhomlynsky, used to tell school children in Ukraine during Soviet occupation. *I’ll Tell You a Story: Philosophy for Children* (2024) is the English translation of the Ukrainian *Ya rozpovim vam kazku ... Filosofiia dlia ditei* (2016) and is a timely contribution to contemporary P4C literature. The second is by Tomaž Grušovnik, who reviews Arie Kizel’s new monograph, *Enabling Students’ Voices and Identities: Philosophical Inquiry in a Time of Discord* (2024). Both reviews draw our attention to the ways in which these authors are responding in educational ways to the turbulent times our society currently faces.

We hope that the fourteen essays in these two Special Issues will have together advanced the open and critical discussion of the topic ‘Literature and Philosophy in Schools’. The contributions have come from a wide array of countries: Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States. Geographical diversity brings with it viewpoint diversity. The authors have brought a broad variety of literary topics and genres to their papers. Perhaps more still needs to be done to connect literary study to the philosophical community of inquiry as a suitable and adaptable pedagogy. Undoubtedly, there is still a lot to explore in bringing together the two components of our topic.

Raymond Driehuis

Alan Tapper

Special Issue Guest Editors

References

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Sukhomlynsky, V (2024) *I'll tell you a story: Philosophy for Children*. (O Sukhomlynska, compiler; N Bezsalova, A Cockerill & B Karaim, trans). From the Ukrainian version *Ya rozpovim vam kazku ... Filosofiia dlia ditei* (2016). EJR Publishing, Chapel Hill, Brisbane, QLD.