



# **Seize the day: The "carpe diem" scene from Dead Poets Society as an anticipatory set for beginning a teaching unit on poetry**

*Richard Grünert*

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Seminar paper from the year 2008 in the subject English - Pedagogy, Didactics, Literature Studies, grade: 12, Justus-Liebig-University Giessen, course: Teaching Short Literary Forms, language: English, abstract: Students often groan at the thought of facing another poetry unit. "This is stupid.", "It doesn't make sense.", "Why do I have to deal with this?". These are common remarks often spilling out of the students at the thought of dealing with poetry. In an attempt to get them to grasp some of the poetry that they will face throughout their education, this teaching unit attempts to use a movie scene as a way of hooking the students. The unit hopes to make enough thematic connections to allow the students the opportunity to more closely examine and explicate a poem by exposing the conduit between it and an individual's biography. In addition to the thematic connections, this unit will also reveal common elements of poetry in a non-threatening environment. Students will learn about concepts like metaphors, allusions and other elements of poetry by first discovering them in the film. At the same time they upgrade and extend their vocabulary with words, terms, idioms and the vernacular that is used within the dialogs around the poem. Their newly acquired knowledge enables them to articulate both personal discernments and popular apprehensions on the vicissitudes of life (and may even trigger the desire in one or the other to start writing his or her own poem in English, whether it be in a more traditional form or in a rap or a song) and thus serves the primary target of foreign language education: intercultural communicative competence (cf. Council of Europe 2001: 43). Cinema is a vital and powerful medium, and the hope is that it can be used in an effort to hook the students and bring them closer to the enjoyment of poetry. The presentation of poetry in a form that combines four aspects, namely the visual (or optic), phonetic (or sound), kinetic (moving in a visual succession) and emotional aspect is of great significance to the analysis of what is perceived. Watching a movie is probably the easiest and most comfortable way of knowledge transfer that the students are familiar with. The visualization of a plot in a film offers more challenging potential for what contemporary literature educationalists call the personal response approach (cf. Nünning/Surkamp 2006: 64) than a book (ibid. 247). The learner gets emotionally involved almost immediately and throughout the scene.

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