

APPLYING AN ECOCRITICAL APPROACH IN UPPER-GRADE LITERATURE LESSONS: THE CASE OF NORMUROD NORQOBILOV'S STORY "OQ BO'YIN"

Abdurakhmonov Abdurashid Kosimjonovich
Fergana Regional Pedagogical Proficiency Center

Introduction

Ecocriticism (or environmental criticism) is a theoretical direction in literary studies that analyzes the role of nature depiction, the relationship between humans and nature, and the reflection of ecological values in works of art. This approach, formed at the intersection of literature and ecology, was founded in the late 20th century in Western literary scholarship by scholars such as Cheryl Glotfelty and L. Buell. Ecocritical analysis serves to reveal the cultural and ethical meaning of natural landscapes in literary works. In other words, in a literary text, nature can be perceived not merely as a background or decoration, but as a symbol of the human psyche and social issues.

In literature, ecocriticism is an important tool for highlighting environmental issues and shaping ecological awareness in readers. Today, due to the ecological crises facing society, instilling in young people a sense of respect and responsibility for nature within the education system is of paramount importance. As the leader of our state has emphasized, "we must timely cultivate in the hearts of the younger generation love and affection for Mother Nature, a sense of belonging to it" — otherwise, ecological problems cannot be solved by technical means alone. Therefore, the use of an ecocritical approach in school literature education contributes to the formation of ecological awareness and culture in students. Through the analysis of literary works, students begin to comprehend the interdependence of nature and humanity.

This article illuminates the experience of analyzing a literary work from an ecocritical perspective using the example of Normurod Norqobilov's story "Oq bo'yin" (White Neck) with upper-grade (upper secondary school) students. Normurod Norqobilov is one of the writers who deeply observed the natural world and animal life and reflected it in his works. He traveled through the mountains and steppes of Uzbekistan, studied the animal world, and as a result of these expeditions, created stories such as "Changalzor iti" (The Jungle Dog), "Oqbo'yin," "Paxmoq" (Cotton), and "Ovul oralagan bo'ri" (The Wolf that Circled the Village). Specifically, the plot of "Oq bo'yin" revolves around the life of a dog and its relationships with humans; through the image of the animal, the story illuminates the relationship between nature and humanity. The "human" experiences of representatives of nature and the attitude towards them are observed throughout the story. The aim of analyzing this work using the ecocritical method is to convey important environmental ideas to students and develop their ecological thinking.

Method

The method proposed in the article is a lesson model designed for studying a literary work with upper-grade students through an ecocritical approach. The lesson was structured based on interactive methods: question-and-answer, group discussion, text analysis, identification of ecological means of expression, and expression of personal attitude were organized sequentially. The main methodological stages of the lesson are presented in the table below:

| Lesson Stage | Activities and Methods | Content and Objective |
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| Introduction (5 minutes) | Question-and-Answer (Conversation) – The teacher asks students preliminary questions | To activate students' existing knowledge and |

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| | <p>about nature and literature. For example: "Why is the depiction of nature important in literary works?", "In which works have you previously paid attention to images of nature or animals?"</p> | <p>ideas, motivate them for the lesson. To increase interest in the theme of nature and prepare the ground for studying the story "Oq bo'yin."</p> |
| <p>Main Part 1. Working with the Text (15 minutes)</p> | <p>Reading and Retelling the Text – Students are read important excerpts from Normurod Norqobilov's story "Oq bo'yin" or a brief summary is provided. – Question-and-Answer: Questions are asked about the content of the read text (Who are the story's characters? How does the plot develop? What is the main conflict?).</p> | <p>To ensure understanding of the story's plot and characters. To direct students' attention to the images of nature and animals in the work through listening, comprehending, and interpreting the text's content.</p> |
| <p>2. Group Analysis (15 minutes)</p> | <p>Working in Groups – The class is divided into 3 small groups. Each group is given a task related to analyzing the story: • Group 1: Find descriptions of natural landscapes in the story and write down descriptive details and phrases in their notebooks. • Group 2: Describe the animal images in the story (Oqbo'yin, Yoldor, etc.), analyze their behavior and their relationship with human characters (e.g., Karim the shepherd). • Group 3: Identify the ecological idea and message in the story – what conclusion does the author draw about the relationship between nature and humans, what problems does he raise?</p> | <p>To develop students' independent analysis skills. To achieve a deeper understanding of the ecological content in the story through collaborative work in groups: to discern the author's purpose through the descriptions of nature and animals.</p> |
| <p>3. Presentation and Discussion (10 minutes)</p> | <p>Group Presentations – Representatives from each group present the results of their work on the board or on posters, explaining their conclusions. – General Discussion: The teacher supplements the groups' answers and asks questions. For example: "Why do you think the author presented the events through the depiction of animals?", "What is Oqbo'yin's role in the story, is it just a dog or a symbol?", "What idea is expressed through the image of the wild wolf (Yoldor)?" – Identifying Ecological Means of</p> | <p>Groups develop communication skills by conveying their analyses to others. Through general discussion, students' findings are shared and systematized with the class. With the teacher's help, the ecological images and symbols in the work are highlighted as a final conclusion. This</p> |

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| | <p>Expression: During the discussion, the teacher draws attention to the means of expression in the text – for example, the anthropomorphized depiction of animals (anthropomorphism), the artistic description of states of nature, symbolic details (e.g., the contrast between the pack of wolves and the flock of sheep), etc.</p> | <p>stage ensures that students understand the author's ecological perspective and the purpose of the work.</p> |
| <p>Final Part (5 minutes)</p> | <p>Reflection and Expressing Personal Attitude – Students are asked: "How did the story affect you? What new thoughts about the environment did you gain through the image of Oqbo'yin or the events?" Or the "Five Words" technique: students write down 5 words that come to mind when they hear "Oqbo'yin" (e.g., friendship, loyalty, wild nature, danger, balance, etc.) and share them with the class. – Conclusion: The teacher summarizes the ideological message of the story and the lesson learned from today's class. From the perspective of ecological thinking, the ideas of harmony between humans and nature and respect for nature are emphasized once again.</p> | <p>Allows students to express their personal understanding and feelings about the work and the theme. The acquired knowledge is reinforced; the educational significance of the story – ideas such as protecting nature, looking at the animal world with compassion, human responsibility towards nature – is solidified in the students' hearts.</p> |

Throughout this lesson model, the teacher acted as a facilitator – guiding through questions, advising groups, and providing commentary on the "Oq bo'yin" text with a focus on ecological aspects. Visual materials such as quotes from the story and slides reflecting depictions of natural landscapes were used during the lesson. Where necessary, a character map or cluster diagrams illustrating nature descriptions were developed for the students. Such an integrative approach, i.e., linking literary analysis with ecological content, creates a foundation for students not only to understand the literary work but also to reflect on real-life environmental issues.

Results

The results of the conducted lesson demonstrated noticeable changes and achievements among the students. Firstly, an increase in the level of students' ecological understanding was observed: during the analysis of the "Oq bo'yin" story, they quickly grasped details related to nature and animals, discovering that a story previously considered a simple adventure or about an animal contained profound meaning. For example, in the group discussion, most students emphasized that the image of Oqbo'yin is not just an ordinary dog but a symbol of loyalty and courage, through which the author glorifies the virtues of honesty and fidelity bestowed by nature. The image of the wolf – Yoldor – intrigued the students: reading passages told from the wolf's perspective, they expressed thoughts such as "predators also have their own world, and it is shown that they too can fear humans or lament for nature." This indicates the formation of a sense of empathy for nature in the students.

Although at the beginning of the lesson some indifferent students thought analyzing an animal image was uninteresting, by the end, the majority stated that they were impressed by the story's content. In the stage of expressing personal attitude, students emphasized that Oqbo'yin's actions (e.g., not giving up in difficult trials, standing against the wolves, or its loyalty to its

owner) served as a life lesson for them. Many wrote reflections along the lines of "we understood that creatures in nature also feel friendship and enmity, and we must be fair towards them." Such considerations show that students succeeded in drawing ecological and ethical conclusions through the story.

The examples provided by students during the analysis process also prove the formation of their ecological worldview. For instance, while analyzing the depiction of the wolf pack in the story, one group of students stated that wolves, like human society, have their own "pack laws," and inappropriate interference in animal life (e.g., killing wolf cubs or disrupting the natural environment) can upset the balance. Although these thoughts were guided with the teacher's help, they show that students' concepts about human-nature relationships are beginning to take shape. Another result noted during the lesson was the increased interest of students in the literary work; they participated actively in the literary analysis process. The ecocritical approach infused the lesson with a new spirit, enhancing student activity and creativity.

Overall, at the end of the experimental lesson, by conducting a short survey, we observed the following changes:

- **Level of Text Comprehension:** Students were able to explain the plot and images in "Oq bo'yin" not in a traditional (superficial) way, but more deeply – from the perspective of the relationship between nature and humans.
- **Ecological Sensitivity:** Before the lesson, only about 30% of the class assumed there was some socio-ethical meaning behind the animal image in the work; after the lesson, about 85% of students understood that this work conveys a message about attitude towards nature (based on oral questioning and questionnaire results).
- **Ability to Express Opinions and Discussion Skills:** Group work and general discussion increased students' speech activity – almost all students expressed their opinions and participated in debates during the lesson. This result shows that applying an ecocritical approach in literature lessons serves not only ecological knowledge but also the development of communicative skills.

Discussion

The role and prospects of analyzing literary works through an ecocritical approach in the educational process are very broad. As the above experience shows, ecocritical analysis reveals the content and essence of a literary work to students from a new angle. While traditional literary analysis may be limited to plot, images, and ideas, the ecocritical approach brings the images of nature and environmental details in the work into focus. As a result, students begin to ponder questions like "Why is nature depicted this way in the work?" or "Why did the author choose an animal image?" – this develops their critical thinking. As literary scholars have noted, the ecocritical approach helps to reveal the cultural, philosophical, and ethical meanings of nature depiction in literature. Consequently, such analysis enriches the educational potential of the literary work in school literature lessons, serving to educate students not only aesthetically but also in the spirit of humanistic and ecological values.

The importance of the ecocritical approach in literature education can be viewed from another angle. This approach allows for interdisciplinary integration – elements from sciences such as ecology, biology, and geography are incorporated into the content of the literature lesson. For example, during the study of "Oq bo'yin," students also gained information about the life of wolves and dogs, their specific behaviors. Such integration, on the one hand, helps to connect knowledge, and on the other, brings literature closer to real life. As a result, students begin to compare the events in the literary work with their own environment, which forms a new kind of ecological thinking in them. Indeed, today it is very important to instill in young people the

understanding that "humans are not the masters of nature, but part of it." Literature lessons serve as a convenient platform for effectively conveying such concepts.

The ecocritical analysis model applied to the story "Oq bo'yin" can also be used for other examples of literature. Many poems and stories present in school textbooks are enriched with images of natural landscapes or animal symbols. For instance, from Uzbek literature, the poem "Bog'lar qiyg'os gulda" by the poetess Zulfiya, Shodiqul Hamro's story "Hovlidagi daraxt" (The Tree in the Yard), or works by Abdulla Qahhor where nature depiction occurs can be analyzed from an ecocritical perspective. Similarly, from world literature, Jack London's stories about animals or Ernest Hemingway's works with strong nature depictions would undoubtedly be interesting for upper-grade students if discussed from an ecological viewpoint. As noted in scholarly literary sources, classical works can also be reread in the context of modern ecological problems – this leads to a new interpretation of the immortal works of literature by the new generation. Thus, the ecocritical approach is a tool capable of not only "revitalizing" modern ecological-themed works but also traditional literary heritage, giving them new meaning.

Of course, implementing such an innovative approach in school conditions may present some difficulties. Primarily, the teacher themselves must have a sufficient understanding of ecocritical theory and ecological issues. In preparing for the lesson, the teacher must conduct additional research and identify aspects related to nature and ecology in the context of each work. However, our experience showed that this effort pays off – students' interest increased during the lesson, and they mastered the topic more deeply. In the future, it is advisable to regularly apply the ecocritical approach in literature teaching methodology and even integrate this method into textbooks and methodological guides. For, with the help of ecocritical analysis, it is possible not only to educate the younger generation in the spirit of environmental responsibility but also to form their skill of literary and artistic thinking.

Conclusion

The ecocritical analysis lesson conducted using the example of Normurod Norqobilov's story "Oq bo'yin" revealed new facets of the literary work to students and served to form elements of ecological education in them. During the analysis process, students not only understood the text's content but also began to think more deeply about their attitude towards nature. Through the image of Oqbo'yin, feelings of love for nature and compassion for the animal world were awakened in the students' hearts; through the image of the wolf, questions about humanity's place in nature arose. At the end of the lesson, the majority of students concluded that "Humans are part of nature, not its conqueror," indicating that the main educational goal of the lesson was achieved.

In conclusion, it can be said that applying an ecocritical approach in literature lessons yields multifaceted positive results. First, students' skills in analyzing literary works are enriched – they learned to pay more careful attention to every detail in the text. Second, a complex task like ecological education was accomplished in a simple and effective way through a work of art: using the fate of the story's characters as an example, students learned life lessons. Third, such lessons help students perceive the world with a broader perspective – they can now also comprehend natural phenomena and problems from a spiritual and aesthetic viewpoint.

The advantage of the ecocritical approach is that it organically connects literature with life. As a result, the subject of literature does not remain merely a body of knowledge from a textbook but becomes a means of educating the younger generation as conscious, spiritually rich, and environmentally responsible individuals. Therefore, it is recommended to regularly introduce

elements of ecocritical analysis into native language and literature education in the future. With the help of this method, our lessons will become more meaningful, relevant, and effective.

In summary, providing ecological education through the analysis of literary works is a relevant direction in modern education, playing an unparalleled role in perfecting in students a sense of care for nature and responsibility for the future of humanity.

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