

**Teaching William Blake's The Songs of Innocence and of Experience to  
University ESL Students with Reader-Response and Freirian Pedagogy**

**By**

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## Abstract

This study examines the use of reader-response theory and Freirian pedagogy in the teaching of selected poems from William Blake's *The Songs of Innocence and of Experience* to university ESL students in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico. It explores whether reader-response is useful in helping students understand Blake's poems. It determines if the students were able to understand the poems from the Romantic poet by working in a student-centered environment created by reader-response. In order to determine the value of reader-response, students' written responses during a six day teaching plan of small group discussions were collected and studied. The results indicated that the cultural background and personal experiences of the students have an influence on their comprehension of the poems as students found the poems to be of critical importance to life issues and Christian faith.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to my family and closest friends, as well as to the memory of Juan Álvarez and Cruz Lydia Acevedo. They have given me support and have endured sacrifices through the years in order to make sure that all needs are well provided for. The upbringing which I have received has motivated me to never give up and always strive for more. They taught me how never to fear trying new things because there is much that can be gained from those experiences.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

In reading a wide range of literature from many periods students build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g, philosophical, ethical, aesthetic, cultural and social) of human experience. In knowing of those dimensions of human experience students become familiar with the Romantic period and gain an opportunity to understand the works of William Blake. Through the reading of poetry, students also apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. In combination of the dimensions of human understanding with reading strategies students increase their literacy. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g, sound-letter correspondence, structure, context, graphics). As Rosenblatt (1978) notes, this allows students to apply prior knowledge in order to look for meaning and as such allows them to learn through the use of reader-response. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes. Students use a variety of technological and informational resources (e.g, handouts, databases, computer networks) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge. As suggested by Freire (1970) students conduct research on issues by generating ideas, questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

In this study the students' engagement with the selected poems by the English Romantic William Blake provides evidence for reader/text transaction gained as a means to determine how ESL readers make meaning from their experience with texts. By using the primary sources and teacher guidance, students can take an active role in looking for meaning and their ability to understand a poem is demonstrated by their performance through their responses. These responses are elicited according to the textual, experiential, social and cultural perspectives they bring to the text.

In addition, the principles presented by Freire (1970), Rosenblatt (1978), Slavit et al. (2002) and others represent a constellation of theoretical and pedagogical perspectives that guide educators to teach in a knowledgeable, effective working manner that will offer ESL students success. Among faculty members there is concern about the number of students at the university level that do not read well. During my experience as a graduate teaching assistant, as well as the experience of peers, it was noted that students lack the knowledge or skills necessary to interpret and comprehend a literary text, and find poetry particularly difficult. As a committed educator advocating for struggling readers, the aim is to try an alternative to reading instruction using the poetry of William Blake, an important poet during the Romantic Period, with second year ESL students in the basic track.

William Blake was selected for this study because my students at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez Campus at the Basic English level in Literature and Composition have found poetry rather difficult. However, Blake's form of expression, and the song like manner in which his poems were written appeared rather interesting. What caught my students' attention was the fact that the issues are still relevant to our

times. Using Blake's poems from *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience* allows students and myself to appreciate the stylistics which are expected of poetry and content matter that are present today thereby promoting discussion within the classroom and responses to the themes covered. Blake as an artist used art in conjunction with his poetry. Today students seem to be visual and drawn to Blake's experimentation in multimedia. The Blake archive is used because it extends to the students a wide range of texts in illustrated form that can encourage students understanding. With images and text the students' interactions between the illuminated work and the poems encourage deeper, more responsible understanding of his aims and methods. Blake is selected as the author of focus in this study not only for the relevant content and social context presented within his poetry but also because he did not live by the motto or the focus placed on nature as other Romantics. In this sense Blake appeared to be different from his contemporaries, such as Wordsworth and Coleridge. Instead he focused on the dehumanization of society and its moral codes and constructions during his lifetime. Blake seemed to be sensitive to the oppressive government measures of his day, he was concerned with the conduct of life and he opposed the rationality and arrogant optimism of his century based on reason. Students talk about life conduct on a daily basis, they also oppose ideas that do not seem acceptable to them as they rationalize their way through an argument and for this reason it was understood that the students would be able to relate to Blake.

The use of William Blake will demand that students find a way to understand the turbulent world of the British Romantic period, one of revolution, reaction, and for poets such as Blake the literary world became interwoven with the industrial, political, social, economic, spiritual-religious and ethical realities around them. Blake and his

contemporaries were known for expressing defiance against conformity, and they held in high regard the powers of human potentiality. Knowledge and understanding of Blake's world motivate students to interpret the poems. As noted by Applebaum (1996) in the introduction to his anthology on English Romantic Poetry: "[Blake] also found a new voice in poetry, achieving remarkable results with the simplest means and restoring rich musicality to the language (Applebaum v)." In spite of the simplicity of the language, which resembles a lullaby, most students are aware that the poems cannot be as simple as they seem, and they feel challenged in finding meaning within the poem.

"Tiger, tiger, burning bright  
 In the forests of the night,  
 What immortal hand or eye  
 Could frame thy fearful symmetry?" (Applebaum 7)

The reference to "In the forests of the night," in *The Tyger* leads us to understand there is symbolism thus showing how deceptively simple these poems are. Such lines also appear in other Blake poems; for example in the *Book of Urizen* (1794) Blake makes a reference to issues concerning eternity, space, time and a supreme being. The *Song of Los* (1795) and *Book of Ahania* (1795), likewise, discuss the same issues. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793) presents allusions to forests in Plate II, while in *America: a Prophecy* (1793) Blake makes a reference to the night and alludes to the "ancient forests" in line 93. In *Europe: a Prophecy* (1794) Blake uses the same line "in forests of the night (10:18)." In reading Blake's works it becomes clear that unlike other Romantics he does

not talk about nature but instead he adorns his subjects with features of nature. Likewise lines 3 and 4 appear to be a simple question but the possible answers are philosophically complex crossing the boundaries of religion. The possibilities of meaning thus become multiple.

Another goal of this study is to heighten students' ability to problem solve the poems *Nurses Song*, *Holy Thursday*, *The Lamb*, and *The Tyger*. In so doing students' literary competence requires their analytical skills to generalize from the given poems to aspects of the literary tradition that concern personal or social significance outside literature as well.

In English 3202 (English Composition and Reading) students are required to respond to a variety of assigned readings, including poetry. However, students cannot respond to a literary piece if they do not understand it, and they are not likely to understand if they do not have the necessary linguistic proficiency and literary competence. I have noticed that many students need materials and tasks to attempt to extract meaning from or engage with the text. As noted by Elliott (1990), Brown (2001) and Aebersold and Field (1997) literature will only be motivating and effective if students can engage with it.

For this reason students will be offered an instructional reading guide for approaching the poems of *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience* (1789-1794) by William Blake. This study aims to demonstrate that academically under-prepared readers can become strategic, knowledgeable readers who are confident in their responses. Students can attain this with the use of reader-response's text engagement, Freire's pedagogy on generative themes, Blake's discussion of social issues which are

still faced today and a reading guide to promote students' engagement in the aforementioned areas. If the students cannot relate to the poems, thoughts, and emotions and appreciate the works' qualities, their literary competence will not be improved.

To improve their literary competence an instructional reading guide was prepared for approaching the poetry of William Blake that is designed around reader-response theory and Freirian pedagogy. The reading guide is an instructional method of organizing and presenting material around themes or topics that integrate activities from the required curriculum. With the help of this guide students acquire the ability to interpret Blake's poems providing genuine responses. The reading guide includes teacher's literary references, materials, resources, and worksheets, (see Appendix B), which are to be taught during the semester. The strategies applied in the reading guide were intended to provide the skills necessary for the exploration of the poems and the relationship between the readers and the poems. The areas of focus in the reading guide serve to meet those needs most commonly noted by the students when reading Blake's poetry such as content. This reading guide seeks to put the teaching of reading and writing skills in the context of a real world subject that is both specific enough to be practical, and broad enough to allow exploration. Reader-response has suggested that it is best to go from general to specific for schema to be activated. The aim of the reading guide is to integrate the student's academic needs in developing critical reading and writing skills. Reader-response and Freirian pedagogy give the students an opportunity to take an active role in looking for meaning. In reading, students do not only discover meaning but also master the text while interpreting the poems. Also pertinent to the themes in each poem are form, new vocabulary, historical and cultural information. Obtaining genuine responses from

the students using reader-response theory seems appropriate as an approach to be used in teaching Blake's poems. Reader-response as a theory assigns interpretative dominance of the text to the reader. Consequently the process of reading for the students is one of creation and discovery through the integration of their own needs, understanding and expectations of the poems.

Reader-response is one of the many ways to help students further develop existing reading and writing abilities in an attempt to make meaning of the text. This study seeks to understand the extent to which reader-response assists students in developing responses to the poetry of William Blake. Although much class time is devoted to reading and writing in courses like English 3202, students do not seem to engage in enough critical reading and writing skills which puts them at a disadvantage when writing responses to poetry.

The development of a reading guide and the development of tasks therein apply reader-response principles to focus on the importance of content and context to aid in the collection of genuine student responses, thus obtaining significant and meaningful learner responses to the poem, in other words, responses that students do not base solely on subjective personal experience. Rather they combine previously acquired knowledge with specific details from within the poems. Students also learn how to identify details that give them the first impressions of the readings as well as the knowledge and reading skills required for understanding the poems.

In short, the goal of this study includes the development of a reading guide that will help the students with the process of refining their responses to the content of the poems by Blake. In so doing, it is expected that students' analytical competence will

increase by adapting their understanding of the poems from concerns of personal or social significance in their lives. Through the development of a reading guide on Blake's poetry, this researcher constructed a reading guide that applies reader-response theory to Freirian Pedagogy to focus on the importance of content and context. This will aid in gathering significant and meaningful learner incursion into the poems as students provide genuine responses. Students are also expected to substantiate a well-grounded argument by using quotes or examples that are relevant and specific. In searching for understanding of the poems students are equipped with the knowledge and reading skills required for understanding poetry in the basic track at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez Campus.

In the course of carrying out the six day lesson plan provided in the reading guide, I will answer the following research questions.

### **Research Questions:**

1. How necessary is it to have background information in reader- response for ESL students in English to interpret a poem?
2. Can Blake be taught with minimal instruction from the teacher as Freirian Pedagogy implies?
3. Rosenblatt considered the use of tools for activating schema in order to elicit response. Does using visual aids such as Blake's plates help students understand the poems? What difference does it make to see the different plates of the poems?

4. Do multiple readings of a poem within reader-response provide different effects in students' perceptions or understanding of the poem from their first response to the last?
5. Both Rosenblatt and Freire had discussed the idea of students being able to relate to the material once they have made a connection to their own experiences. At what point do students relate to the poems, if that happened at all?
6. Freire discussed the necessity of creating consciousness in students of the social experiences that they encounter. Looking at students responses what are they more conscious of at the end of the six day lesson that they were not conscious of before?

## Chapter Two

### Review of the Literature

Theoretical work and research in the areas of reader-response, poetry, group discussions and journals, show that educators need to vary the ways in which they teach ESL students to succeed in getting them involved in their own education. Following Freirian Pedagogy the primary principle here is that not all learning needs to go through the professor. Professors do not have to comment on or respond to every utterance students produce. We want students to become independent learners during their process of understanding by searching for the missing information they need. Students should be able to produce generative themes: themes of socially universal situations, called generative due to their potential to unfold into other themes and tasks while promoting dialogue.

The idea is to help the reader deliberately choose and self-consciously enter the arena of interpretative conflict by offering an explanation of how hermeneutic (See Appendix A) disagreements work. Hermeneutics is a theory of interpretation, which holds that meaning is not straightforward but continually modified by feedback. Many reader-response and Freirian advocates, such as Rosenblatt (1978), Iser (1978), Shor (1999), McLaughlin (1996), and others, believe that using debates or activities in which students express themselves is an ideal way of teaching because they foster information acquiring techniques as well as developing an interest for social concerns and training for self-expression.

This chapter builds a theoretical background to develop viable strategies that focus on obtaining genuine reader-responses and improving analytical reading skills

through appropriate and effective reading guides. To arrive at an effective approach based on the review of the literature it is important to understand the concepts of reader-response theory, Freirian pedagogy, William Blake's poetry, and the Romantic period.

In order to integrate the students' own needs, according to their ability and understanding of the poem; to tasks with reader-response theory would give students an opportunity to take an active role in looking for meaning in Blake's poems.

It is unfortunate that promoting reading competency and teaching poetry to an ESL audience strikes far too many educators as difficult or not interesting to students. Thinking that Blake is too boring or difficult for students is a misconception many educators hold, greatly underestimating their students' analytical potential. However, there are incalculable benefits to having students read poetry enabling them to become more critical and aware of their reading. By reading poetry students become aware of the language that others use to express themselves. Being conscious of such sensitivity towards language makes students more tolerant and understanding individuals who are more likely to find an interest in language. The major challenge noted in teaching poetry is that it requires dedication and imagination from the teacher, since ESL learners have not yet acquired a level of language to appreciate or express the particulars of a regular discussion, let alone those of poetry. By using a reader-response and Freirian pedagogy approach and using journal entries with small-group discussions as the method of application, students can learn how to better approach poetry.

### **Reader-Response Theory**

Reader-response is a theory generally used in teaching as a means of getting students to interact with literature with minimal interference from the teacher. It is

believed that students can reach the meaning of a work without having to depend on other information outside of the text. However, using other sources is encouraged so that students can support their initial beliefs about the work or to shape their perceptions of the work toward a specific direction such as gender related issues.

Reader-response points to the necessity of considering the reader when it comes to interpretation and the development of activities which promote reading skills. Aebersold and Field (1997) do not discuss reader-response but stress the relationship between reader and text as an important part of the reading-process, emphasizing as Freire does, that "The more invested and involved students are in their learning, the more responsibility they will take for their learning (Aebersold and Field 37)." They argue that once the students have established purposes for reading they make a genuine commitment to the reason for reading. The aim is to give students a purpose to read poetry and help students become aware that their background knowledge plays an important role in interpretation.

In reader-response theory this allows for awareness of what has to be kept in mind when designing reading lessons and tasks. The readers' background knowledge is important in the development of classroom activities that promote improvement of reading skills. As Aebersold and Field indicate, prior background knowledge or experiences are an influencing factor in the reading process thus relating to reader-response theory.

With a focus on teaching, Brown (2001) cites Clark and Silberstein (1977:136-37) concerning background knowledge in which they state, "More information is contributed by the reader than by the print on the page." The readers understand what they read

because they are capable of taking that stimulus beyond the visual graphics and assigning the observed into a category of concepts that have already been stored in their memories. Thus the readers' skills depend on the efficiency of their interactions between their knowledge of linguistics, literature, and the world.

Reader-response theory relies on experience to promote genuine student responses that allow the student to connect with the text. Reader-response theory suggests that using background knowledge may be the best way to obtain student response, as it heightens students' ability to produce genuine responses while using their schemata (See Appendix A) to find meaning and connect to the text. With a focus on the ESL environment Ernst-Slavit, et al. (2002) suggest that educators need to understand that ESL students have a different cultural background, skills and past experiences based on a different language.

Ernst-Slavit et al. indicate that learners acquire a second language based on individual student characteristics and language background. It is suggested that language develops best in settings that promote talk and interaction. Ernst states that "it helps students understand new concepts and provides a scaffold for learning through reading and writing (Ernst 1994)." Through a combination of all three modes students develop increasing facility in language and control over social interaction, thinking and learning. Ernst-Slavit et al. also indicate that providing a stress-free environment with continued support and encouragement where students do not feel pressured is a requirement for learning. By reducing anxiety teachers can lead students to language development and cultural adaptation. They also state that when students have difficulty trying to fit in their surroundings the frustration develops into what Khols defined as adaptation fatigue. It is

an unwillingness to interact due to constant emotional and cognitive drain of interpreting linguistic and cultural signals while being expected to respond. A good strategy for class time is to continue providing opportunities to facilitate students' experimentation with the language once students' linguistic capabilities have increased in ways that allow participation. Literature is one of the best ways to establish a common experience amongst students since discussion can be encouraged as students tell their own stories and teachers introduce questions.

Teachers should encourage students to explore their own identities within the context of social themes that are expressed in literature. Having successfully learned a language students become able to ask for assistance, share insights, and stage opinions. More important, students are able to critically examine information, creatively suggest solutions, and consistently hypothesize possible avenues to follow. Freire also advocated in favor of educating students in becoming independent learners.

In relation to the development of students' critical analysis McLaughlin (1996) discusses the unending project of questioning assumptions about meaning, value, and perception that shape our experiences of the world. According to him, everything is made possible and confirmed by moments of experience. This idea alludes to reader-response theory as a valuable part of the critical reading process. He believes that anyone can ask fundamental questions about culture; a premise that Freire, Rosenblatt, Ernst-Slavit and others advocate in favor of the readers' abilities.

McLaughlin considers most people speak a critical language grounded in local concerns rather than an elitist academic knowledge. McLaughlin believes that ordinary people such as our students are overlooked or denied. He suggests that ordinary

individuals can achieve a critical consciousness of their own. McLaughlin quotes Willis who suggests that it is being aware of how things really work in a worldly-wise manner that clears up the dimensions of life. People use their own experiences and practices to ask questions about the culture they live in. Many see the facts but fail to see the cause that explains the facts. This is important to the study because it supports the students' use of their experience for understanding.

McLaughlin believes the learners are in charge of their own learning. On a similar note to what Freire and Ernst-Slavit expressed McLaughlin indicates that we should teach intellectual freedom instead of compliance. In addition, he makes reference to Adorno who believes that being rational is to make the best of conditions from the viewpoint of one's private interests. McLaughlin acclaims reader-response theory for making interpretation an active process through which the reader makes meaning. McLaughlin wants people to engage in such practices, to question and articulate the values that guide our preferences.

Looking into the foundation of reader-response, Rosenblatt (1978), claims that "the poem comes into being by the connection between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt 14)." She indicates that evoking the poem involves defining the range of possibilities within perception, finding a common reference to create unity of thoughts, looking for clues, and decoding based on past personal experiences. Rosenblatt indicates that the reader's attention is focused on what remains as the residue after the reading; the response comes from what students retained of the reading or when the reader's concern is with what happens during the reading which develops critical thinking. The reader

must decipher, associate, pay attention to feelings, ideas and attitudes as well as the words and referents produced.

The main focus of reader-response theory is that "the reading of any work of literature is, of necessity, an individual and unique occurrence involving the mind and emotions of a particular reader, (Rosenblatt xii)." Rosenblatt also expressed that Romantics lead to an awareness of the reader with their preoccupation for "the overflow of powerful feeling." The Romantics were considered sensitive to their audience due to their style of writing. This group wrote to communicate directly to the reader in order to create awareness of the author's personal concerns. Through this we notice that experience, content and context play an important role in the interpretation of poetry.

While Rosenblatt discusses issues that are important regarding teaching poetry, she neglects to mention reader-response application within an environment of English as a Second Language (ESL) but proves useful in the observation of poetry and the Romantic Period. The ESL stand-point is of importance because it is the audience that one aims to reach and most leaders in the field discuss reader-response from the point of view of native language readers. The skills and proficiency level of an ESL audience are never entirely up to par with those of native language speakers.

Iser's theory also fails to discuss the ESL stand-point. His contributions, however, have teachers question their approach to approaches that would serve to the benefit of the students. Iser (1978) indicates that a text can only produce a response when it is read because it is impossible to describe this response without analyzing the reading process. The literary work is a form of communication that imposes itself upon the world, prevailing social structures, and existing literature. Response is therefore analyzed in

terms of a dialectic relationship between text, reader, and their interaction. Contrary to Rosenblatt, Iser thinks it is thus called because it brings into play the imaginative and perceptive faculties of the reader in order to adjust and differentiate his own focus. Iser believes a theory of response facilitates discussion of individual interpretations where one should promote reflection on presuppositions operative both in reading and interpreting.

According to Vereker and Corvick, cited by Iser, meaning must be the product of an interaction (See Appendix A) between the textual signals and the reader's acts of comprehension. Meaning is then no longer an object to be defined, but an effect to be experienced. To understand is to interpret, and to interpret is to restate the phenomenon, to find an equivalent for it. Thus, interpretation is not, as most assume, an absolute value or a gesture of mind.

The focal point now is the interaction between the text, the social and historical norms of its environment and the potential disposition of the reader. Iser argues that if the availability of the text is increased and the reader is confronted with experiences that render his habitual orientations uninteresting or irrelevant, then he is obliged to modify these orientations. Iser explains that a lack of availability serves to heighten the degrees to which the reader will project his own standards. This confirms that the meaning of the text is the reader's projection.

On a similar note to Rosenblatt, consistency building, as Iser suggests, is a structure of comprehension that depends on the reader and not the work, and is inextricably bound with subjective factors and the habitual orientations of the reader. The biggest factor in interpretation is the reader since the text can only acquire meaning when it is read. Iser believes that as the reader passes through the various perspectives

offered by the text and relates the different views and patterns to one another, he sets the work himself in motion, as he seeks to relate things to contexts that are familiar. Iser indicates that the meaning of a literary text “is dynamic; the interpreter's task is to elucidate the potential meanings of a text, and not to restrict himself to just one (Iser 22).”

We are guided by experiences in an unconscious manner, and by the end of our reading we are liable to want to incorporate the new experience into our own store of knowledge. This provides a link between all the historical and individual actualizations of the text and makes them accessible to analysis.

In linguistic communication the utterance must invoke a convention that is as valid for the recipient as for the speaker. The application must fit with the situation and must be governed by accepted procedures, and the willingness of the participants to engage in a linguistic action that is proportionate to the degree in which the situation or context defined. All utterances have their place in a situation, arising from it and conditioned by it. Speech is almost always directed at an addressee just as literature is directed to a reader.

To emphasize his views Iser recalls an observation by Lotman who points out that the literary text delivers different information to different readers in accordance with the capacity of his comprehension. It also gives the reader the language to help him appropriate the next portion of data as he reads on. Therefore every system represents a model of reality based on a structure inherent to all systems.

On the topic of reading poetry Aebersold and Field, presented a similar idea to Iser who reports on the relationship between text and reader. He states that the “poetic quality” is linked to the disposition of the individual reader. When something new is

perceived which is not covered by existing schemata, it can only be represented by means of a correction to the schemata. Through correction, the experience of the new perception may be captured and conveyed. Such corrections in Gombrich's sense of the term presuppose a normative principle that regulates perception and representation of the world. Iser explains that this relationship between text and reader is essential for comprehension. This can be applied to Blake in the sense that he changed between the uses of colors with his drawings. He might have intended this as a means to get the reader's attention.

Another factor weighed in by Iser to the complexities of interpretation is the degree to which the mind will implement the prospective connections inherent in the text. These depend on a large number of subjective factors such as memory; interest, attention, and mental capacity, all of which affect the extent to which past contexts become present. Iser believes that as we read, we react to what we have produced, and it is this mode of reaction that enables us to experience the text as an actual event. The idea we conceive in our "mental imagery" is the basic element of passive synthesis. Thus, perception and ideation are two different means of accessing the world. Iser explains that perception requires the actual presence of the object, whereas ideation depends upon its absence. In reading texts, we form mental images, because the "schematized aspects" of the text only offer knowledge of the conditions under which the imaginary object is produced. The image, then, is basic to ideation and adheres to perception in constituting the object.

Image-building in literature however has no empirical outside object with which to relate the image. Iser clarifies that "[t]he literary image represents an extension of our existing knowledge, whereas the image of an existing object only utilizes given

knowledge to create the presence of what is absent (Iser 140-41).” Iser adds, “[w]hat the language says is transcended by what it uncovers, and what it uncovers represents its true meaning. Thus the meaning of the literary work remains related to what the printed text says, but it requires the creative imagination of the reader to put it all together (Iser 142).” Iser points out that “A second reading of the text will never have the same effect as the first, for the simple reason that the originally assembled meaning is bound to influence the second reading (Iser 149).” However, this relates to time sequence and Iser also points out that meaning and significance are not the same thing: they are distinct stages of comprehension. The significance of the meaning can only be established when meaning is related to a particular reference, which makes it translatable into familiar terms. This represents the active taking-over of the meaning by the reader, that is, the meaning taking effect in existence.

As Rosenblatt and Iser discussed within reader-response relevance in teaching the Romantics, particularly the poetry of William Blake, Freund (1987) draws on Abrams study of Romanticism and the triangle diagram that depicts four basic terms in a work of art: universe, work, artist and audience. The diagram represents the basic co-ordinates of critical formation. At the center is work, and in orbit around it are three elements, which constitute the object of critical investigation. Freund indicates that according to Abrams a comprehensive critical approach will strive to give an account of all four terms and the relations between them. However, history shows that during different times one element has been more privileged than the other, hence the critical orientation varies. Abrams presupposed that these terms are fixed and determinate points of reference and will depend on the vision of the gazer and his/her historical context.

Freund also points to Wimsatt arguing that in one mode or another, the reader assumes that our relationship to reality is not a positive knowledge but a hermeneutic construct, that all perception is already an act of interpretation. That the notion of a text-in-itself is empty; that a poem cannot be understood in isolation from its results, and that subject and object are indivisibly bound. The focus of reader-response becomes one of learning how to read, thus undertaking the reading experience and its conditions.

The theoretical grounds will also vary from one case to the next. Freund notes Suleiman who outlines six varieties of approaches in reader-oriented criticism: rhetorical, semiotic and structuralist, phenomenological, subjective and psychological, historical and sociological, and hermeneutic. All serve as a frame of reference and more than one may be applied.

Freund also builds on Richards to define a poem not as "a meaning but as a means of achieving an ordered balance and composure of impulses (Freund 28)." This leads to the influence of experience, as Richards noted, as the personal situation of the reader inevitably affects his reading. Concerning structuralist poetics Richard's builds on Culler and Frye's perspective of the coherence in a work of literature which is reduced to a system that enables other governing systems.

Freund like Riffaterre, stipulates that the reader's task is to discover the signification of the system. As Culler suggests, we give sense to the text either by making it correspond to something in the world or something in another text. Criticism to reader-response then lies on what is natural or immediate in response. It is impossible to establish a distinction "between fact and interpretation, between what can be read in the text and what is read into it (Culler 75) cited in (Freund 88)."

Freund acknowledged, Iser and Ingarden who suggest that reading is a creative process that draws on the reader's personal experience, and requires skill and imagination; and since no two readers are identical, no two concretizations will be either, even when they are the work of the same reader. According to Freund the reader is free to fill in blanks but is at the same time constrained by the patterns in the text; the text proposes and the reader disposes. Quoting Paul de Man, Freund concludes that the dialogue between work and interpreter is endless.

Davis (1989) on the other hand, accounts for the cultural and linguistic factors that enable the reader to create meaning. Davis' focus is on the importance of content and structure to apply reader-response theory in his pedagogical framework. The intended "schema-theoretic model" proves useful for purposes of this study. Davis cites McCormick who claims the model "takes into account both prior background knowledge and reader attitudes (Davis 123)" when teaching literature to foreign language students because it demands an active role of the reader which other models lack. This is also a useful source from which to develop a framework for teaching William Blake with reader-response theory.

With the readers as a particular point of interest in teaching, Elliott (1990), demonstrates the necessity of developing activities that help the students with the process of defining their individual responses. These ideas become useful for the development of a reading guide as it provides information from which to build lessons on teaching Blake. Elliott also provides a strategy of improvisation, a dramatic performance that requires no preparation for developing student-responses. Elliott indicated that students that have a higher level of language proficiency need materials that are motivating in order to

progress. Even though this is a different proficiency level from the student population in English 3202, the choice of materials becomes useful in pointing out assumptions about integrating language and literature in the classroom. He also notes that literature provides authentic material over a wide variety of registers for the students. Elliott states that the process of reading is a process of meaning-creation by integrating one's own needs, understanding and expectations with a written text. Elliott believes that literature can only be understood if "literary competence" has been developed by the reader. Like other critics and teachers regarding reader-response and Freirian pedagogy, Elliott's aim is to enable the student-reader to "discover the meaning of texts from within themselves (Elliott 191)."

On similar concerns as Iser and Freund about reader-response, Armstrong (1990) states that conflicting readings can occur because interpreters with opposing presuppositions about language, literature, and life can generate irreconcilable hypotheses about the meaning of a text. However, Armstrong refutes the idea of determinate readings since they bypass "undecidable" disagreements of interpretation. His aim is to explain why interpreters come about opposing presuppositions.

Armstrong as others like Wimsatt, de Man and Iser also identifies interpretation as a circular process by which we compose a whole as we hypothesize, check, modify, and refine our sense of configuration. He explains that the hermeneutic circle is based on three implications: guesswork, practice or experience, and the idea that nothing has a guarantee since what may seem as effective to some may be ineffective to others. Our preliminary sense is what directs our checks, modifications, and fill-ins.

Armstrong agrees with Beach that our understanding is shaped by our interpretation and not from facts in the text. Thus the circular relation between part and whole in interpretation means only that understanding requires the fitting together of pieces into patterns. Armstrong suggests that all we need in order to exchange views are points of comparison and contrast, overlap and divergence.

Some believe the text's existence depends completely on how it is interpreted and others defend the autonomy of the work to preserve constraints on interpretation. Typically interpreters return to a work not because they haven't gotten it but because they feel they have not exhausted its capacity to be understood in new and perhaps unexpected ways. It is up to us to decide what to do with the adversities that we meet. Anomalies may arise, which testify to the inconsistencies in the interpreter's presuppositions although he/she may not be able to see this difference until pointed out by someone else. We can see something only by perceiving it in relation to a scheme of possible similarities and differences, and this scheme is a product of the observer's past experiences, interests, and assumptions. Armstrong believes that our assumptions merely wait for confirmation, modification, or disproof.

Armstrong states that most words have a range of possible meanings and are thus sensitive to context. The precise meaning of a word is established by its interaction with other words thus continually modifying each other. The community that uses them establishes linguistic conventions, and they are always subject to modification according to its interests and purposes.

Armstrong indicates that poetry is a sort of manipulation of conventions the artist inherits from the general community and from past writers. A poet may either work

within established conventions or against them. Literature becomes the expression of a culture's values, assumptions, and intellectual frameworks and experiment upon schemata for making sense of the world. Armstrong explains, "[t]here is no understanding without coherence, but there are many different ways in which consistency can be established (Armstrong 117)." Armstrong quotes Brooks when he says that poetry becomes significant as cultural anthropology, and as political, religious or moral instrument. Thus, the categories that guide understanding become a struggle for dominance between values, desires, interests and beliefs.

In the same struggle to determine meaning in texts, Eco (1990) states that the written word can accomplish many things and if people become aware of the importance of meaning, then the lesson was fulfilled. He indicates that no text can be interpreted according to a definite, original, and final authorized meaning. Language always says more than its unattainable literal meaning, meaning the interpreted text imposes some constraints upon its interpreters.

Eco argues that there are two models of interpretation, that of symbol and allegory. He draws on (Goethe 1809) for the definition of symbolism and allegory. Symbolism transforms the experience into an idea and an idea into an image, so that the idea expressed through the image remains active and unattainable, even though it is expressed in all languages it remains inexpressible. Allegory transforms experience into a concept and a concept remains defined and expressible by the image. Eco indicates that symbols become allegories and that we read allegorically to find the evidence of natural truths behind myths.

According to Eco in order to understand the meaning of the facts told you had to understand the meaning of the things mentioned. In defining the literal sense you do not only give meaning to the sentence but also to the utterance. If "uttered in given circumstances, it can also convey the actual intentions... of its utterer (Eco 15)." The Dynamic Object can be a thought, an emotion, a motion, a feeling or a belief. A text is uttered by the author's actual intention, and this original intention was motivated by a Dynamic Object.

Eco argues against some intemperance of reader-response criticism. He claims that a theory of interpretation, even when open to multiple readings, must also assume that it is possible to reach an agreement, either of the meanings that the text encourages or those that it discourages.

Presuppositions are part of the information given by a text, subject to agreement by both speaker and hearer, a kind of textual frame which determines the point of view from which the discourse will be developed. In order to understand a text, the reader has to "fill" the text with a number of inferences, connected to a large set of presuppositions defined by a given context such as knowledge, background assumptions, construction of schemata, links between schemata and text, system of values, construction of point of view, and so on.

Returning to reader-response, Allen cited Rosenblatt (1991) states that there are always groups with certain ideas and standards but if we are aware that the basis of our beliefs is that of a community, then we possess the ability to change or modify beliefs as new facts present themselves. Being aware that there are conflicting responses is a necessary tool in being able to negotiate meanings or actions that will respect both

individual diversity and community needs thus heightening a sense of sensitivity for human values. Being aware of how human actions and motives influence our reading, it is the teacher's task to help "students to discriminate between that which should be rejected and what should be retained and strengthened (Rosenblatt 42)."

Rosenblatt was also studied by Salvatori who, like Freire, indicates that the teacher has to help students discover the satisfactions of literature by teaching them how to improve their individual capacities to evoke meaning from the text, which is done by leading them to reflect self-critically on this process.

Hunt concerned about the modes of reading cited Rosenblatt (1991), and suggests narrators invite readers to share fundamental values thus allowing the narrative to be understood in a way that it seems meaningful and potentially relevant to the reader's immediate social context. Hunt also indicates that readers are more likely to make connections between their experience of reading and their immediate situations. Hunt found that readers who seem most engaged, and who feel most satisfied with their readings act as though reading was to make social contact.

Hunt claims that when we read we do not read to find "the truth" about anyone's meaning; we strive only for what we can use. Suggesting that to give the literature class a social status to texts to widen the range of possible student activities gives students the opportunity and responsibility to create for themselves, to share with others, the knowledge and understanding that traditional courses attempt to transmit.

Rosenblatt's views of transaction have been incorporated in Corcoran's views in saying "that people's perceptions of the world are contingent upon their knowledge of language [in the sense that] people are written by and write their language and their

culture,... in one sense form statements in language, but in another powerful sense are formed by their language (Rosenblatt 149).” Corcoran quotes Rosenblatt in saying that “[Students] should try to understand what values are affirmed or rejected by their own reactions (Rosenblatt 154).” This suggests that we should allow exploration of texts, take time for “this reminds me of,” encourage reflection and plan activities to enrich the experience of the work being studied.

From a similar point of view to Armstrong, Beach (1993), surveys the different theories of reader-response and indicates they all share a concern for how readers make meaning from their experiences with the text. Reader-response critics have been classified under three categories, those who believe that it is the text that determines the response, others who believe that meaning is entirely created by the reader and recently some suggest that any exclusive focus on the reader-text transaction is to ignore the influence of social, cultural, or situational contexts.

Beach points out that even within a reader-based orientation, people may adopt different conceptions of readers' roles, purposes, texts, and contexts, suggesting that there is no single reader-response theory. Beach explains that such prescribed roles however neglect to explore the ways in which actual readers may respond which would reflect the nature of the text/reader transaction. He also adds that responses that are not limited to written or oral discussion give grounds to oral interpretation, role-playing, artwork, and rewriting texts, or creating new ones. It is recognized that responses also vary according to specific social, historical or cultural contexts.

Beach suggests that readers write their own responses to the poem and then apply each of the perspectives to those responses. As Armstrong had pointed out, the reader

seeks some sense of coherence that works for him: it is he who fills in the gaps. As readers move through the text, expectations are either filled or frustrated, requiring a continual shifting or revising of perceptions, which may cause readers to become uncertain of what to believe.

With the idea of applying theory to practice, Beach indicates that there are decisions involved with eliciting response such as students' attributes, teachers' attributes, instructional goals and evaluation criteria, relevant response strategies and activities, social/cultural context, and long-term planning. For this study more than the theory had to be considered. Instructional goals had to be defined, evaluation criteria required a table for the results, the response strategies for oral and written communication had to be included and the activities required planning in addition to considerations for the context of the poems used.

Groden and Kreiswirth (1994) also trace Reader-Response and point out that the problem lies in the fact that for different critics "the reader" means different things. Another problem is that narratees and implied readers are not distinguished. The authors also discussed the research of prominent figures. They cite Fish, for example, who insisted that what "happens to, and with the participation of, the reader is 'the meaning' of a text (Fish 25)." As indicated the distinctions among narratees, implied readers, intended readers, and postulated readers are significant and subtle, and not always recognized. Consequently, they are blurred as critics blend them together or move from one to another. Another problem presented by Groden and Kreiswirth is that reader-critics not only differ with respect to what entity they mean by "reader"; they also differ

with regard to the perspective from which they treat it. Most reader-critics admit, to some extent, the necessity of "contextualizing" the act of reading.

Fish claims that meaning is entirely context-dependent and that there is no such thing as literal meaning. However, readers are not simply in a single context; they are always in several. Fish holds the position that the meaning of a literary work is not in the text at all, but rather, the very "properties" of the text are in fact "constituted" by whatever strategies the reader happens to bring to bear on the text. Groden and Kreiswirth cited Fish who stated that "[t]hese strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around (Fish, 171)." In contrast to Fish, Bleich, talks about the students in his classes and uses actual interpretations presented in papers they had written in order to learn where they originate and how the classroom, as a community, can negotiate among them.

Groden and Kreiswirth also cite Jauss who argues that the reader made sense of literature in part through a "horizon of expectations." Since that horizon varies with history, the literary work offers different "views" at different times (Jauss 21-22). Groden and Kreiswirth also refer to Tompkins who claims that the reader's historical situation does not simply affect our view of the work but actually produces whatever it is that we call the text in the first place. "The circumstances in which a text is read... are what make the text available... [and] define the work 'as it really is' - under those circumstances (Groden and Kreiswirth 7)."

The authors point out that there is disagreement among reader-critics not only about the subject of inquiry but also about the whole purpose of critical activity. There is

also disagreement about the proper relationship between the critic and interpretation, and consequently about the descriptive/perspective nature of the critical enterprise. According to Groden and Kreiswirth most audience critics agree that to some extent, readers produce literary meaning; but since there is such widespread disagreements about who that "reader" is and what that production consists of, this apparent agreement yields no unity whatsoever on the issue of the reader's ultimate freedom to interpret as he or she wishes. The authors also indicate that there are critics who start with the text and use the concept of the reader as an analytic tool to perfect traditional interpretative practices.

Groden and Kreiswirth report that "Riffaterre heavily relies on notions of what activities the text requires the reader to perform; readers are forced or compelled by the text (Groden and Kreiswirth 142)." In contrast, other critics use the concept of the reader not to engage in the act of interpretation but rather to explain how interpretations come about. They cited Culler who argued that "the interpretation of individual works is only tangentially related to the understanding of literature... which seeks to identify the conventions and operations by which any signifying practice produces its observable effects of meaning (Culler 48)." Building his argument not on the text but on interpretations already produced, Culler aims to describe the practices that allowed them to come into being.

Other reader-critics use the notion of reader in a different way, neither to persuade nor to explain but to question interpretations. Groden and Kreiswirth also cite Fetterley who believed that without giving up the notion that there are more or less correct intended interpretations. Therefore calling upon readers to recognize interpretations and resist them. Groden and Kreiswirth also cite Radway who questions interpretations as she

criticizes those who use traditional academic interpretative practices to determine cultural meaning. Insisting that cultural importance depends on the meaning it has for those who consume it.

As Groden and Kreiswirth report, the very raising of certain questions have profound consequences for the commonplaces of the literary-critical profession and have encouraged general shifts in the direction of literary studies. Talk of the reader opens up talk of psychology, sociology, and history, and reader criticism has helped break-down the boundaries separating literary study from other disciplines. By highlighting the reader's interpretative practice we clarify the degree to which meaning is dependent upon the reader's performance.

Reader criticism, as the authors indicate, has made it increasingly difficult to support the notion of definitive meaning in its most straightforward form. One can hardly claim that no critics, not even audience critics, continue to support the notion of "right" and "wrong" readings--the position is being increasingly discarded--and even critics who do argue for it have become cautious of how uncertain interpretation is as a procedure and how little we can depend on the texts themselves to provide proper interpretative guidance.

Groden and Kreiswirth report that what is most important, as definitive meaning or evaluation is undermined, since value is even more contextually determined than meaning. Statements of value are increasingly becoming put under pressure by the question, Value for whom? And value is increasingly being viewed not as a quality inherent in texts but rather as a function of particular social, historical, and cultural circumstances. In this study, value is questioned within the responses.

Hirvela (1996) shared his concerns about teaching in an ESL environment with reader-response thus presenting a foundation upon which to build teaching for English 3202 students. Hirvela, a follower of Rosenblatt's theory, argues in favor of the inclusion of reader-response within literature based communicative language teaching. He also contrasts the theory with the personal-response theory to demonstrate which is effective with respect to the use of literature in the ELT classroom. The personal-response model looks at the learner's response to the author's text and intentions whereas reader-response looks at the learner's response to the reader's text. Personal-response emphasizes learning the task and sees reading as a passive activity thus the text dominates the reader. After the comparison Hirvela concludes that while the reader-response theory has not made an impact on ELT, some researchers have acknowledged potential applications of the theory. Using the theory would achieve eliciting "genuine response," citing Elliott, thus enriching and enlarging the role of the contributions literature can make within communicative language teaching. He prefers reader-response theory because personal-response theory lacks the involvement created by the reader-text transaction that becomes valuable in acquiring a genuine response from the students. It challenges authorial intention on the text by assigning interpretative dominance of the text to the reader. The reader's interpretation of the text as he suggests describes not the text itself but how the reader re-created it while reading it. It was the student's lack of engagement with the text in prior teachings that an awareness of the importance of applying reader-response in teaching was developed.

Continuing on reader-response theories with a focus on poetry Dias (1996) studied what happens in the transaction (See Appendix A) between adolescent readers

and poems. He uses transaction in the sense of Rosenblatt as "an active process lived through during the relationship between a reader and a text" (Rosenblatt 1978: 20-21). The study is based on the belief that students have within themselves the potential for making sense of poetry on their own.

Dias monitored small-group discussion and showed that the process of collaboratively creating meaning is "largely one of chance intuitions and fortuitous turns of thought (Dias 2)." The main questions to be asked were by what process readers had arrived at the meanings they offered to the group, how the individuals differ in the way they go about making sense of poetry and could there be in their transactions identifiable individual patterns of reading. Such interest is based on the idea that not enough is known about the process by which readers make sense of poetry in order for there to be a consensus on which teaching practices assist or inhibit the process of reading a poem. Dias reports that most teaching practices of poetry emphasize close-reading as it sees a poem as an object to be analyzed, an object that will reveal full meaning only when its complex inner workings are explained.

In earlier works Dias had found that "making sense" and "understanding poetry" are goals readers set themselves when asked to read a poem and report on their response. However, instruction to "report on your response or experience of the poem" would suggest a passive role that is not in keeping with the active role assumed before the literary text.

According to Dias, the problem is that response represents the end result of a process rather than the process itself. Therefore the aim of Dias' study was to tap response as it occurs, reduce the constraints that might inhibit readers' responses and their

articulation of those responses, recognize that the readers involved are inexperienced readers of poetry and most likely inhibited about responding to poetry and ruled by school-conditioned expectations about what one says and does not say when asked to respond to a poem. He also aimed to provide a comprehensive base for the analysis that must follow in order to develop confident readers of literature while providing a record of the process of responding to literature.

For this study, students are expected to be able to construct meaning from the text. Results show that the procedure helps develop articulateness in talking about poetry and boosts students' confidence in their own resources as readers of poetry. It also encourages independent thinking and risk taking in formulating statements about poems. The same occurs in showing a gradual movement away from defensiveness about one's opinion and intolerance for others' opinions toward holding, confirming or revising personal opinion by attending to the text and the opinions of the group. The elements of reader behavior fall into two major categories, what the readers bring to the poem, and how the reader moves through the poem. Dias has classified how a poem means under the idea that a poem is a complex way of saying something simple and all aspects of a poem contribute to the meaning of a poem and must be taken into account in one's reading. The other idea is that a poem usually symbolizes or represents one of several stock themes about life or nature or that a poem embodies a complex meaning that is never fully realized but can grow with each reading. In this study, I expect students to gather meaning from the issues of life that the poem may embody.

Based on prior knowledge Dias found that the reader is open to personal experience rather than draw on personal experience. Based on the relationship to a poetic

text he found that readers attend closely to the text and that some set the text aside. Other elements used called for visualizing, questions about vocabulary and attending to the title.

Donoghue (1998) argues that Rosenblatt only distinguishes two types of reading: efferent reading, which is used for general and common information, and aesthetic reading, which is used where a new experience is offered and a new focus of attention requires a concentration on lived-through experience on the part of the reader.

Among other things, Donoghue defines interpretation. It begins when we have acknowledged a claim and set about fulfilling it. "We move along the interpretative process when we try to make our preliminary understanding of the text explicit to ourselves, thereby turning the occasion into an experience (Donoghue 80)." The key to interpretation is that we must take into account the context or as he quotes Bateson "the framework of reference within which the work achieves meaning (Donoghue 85)." To identify "How to know when an interpretation is correct? [Donoghue quotes Richards who said] "[w]hen an interpretation hangs together without conflicting with anything else; history, and literary tradition (Donoghue 103)." Students in the classroom are expected to find an agreement in understanding before they are able to move onto other things. If they cannot find agreement in understanding they would need to question what the problem may be before they can move on.

In reference to reader-response Leitch (2001) informs that Iser shows how readers take an active part in the composition of the text's meaning. "According to Iser, literary texts provide the foundation for their interpretation, but they also imply the action of the reader. Reading is a process of discovery; a reader questions, negates, and revises the expectations that the text establishes, filling in what Iser calls "blanks" or "gaps" in the

text and continually modifying his or her interpretation (Leitch 1671).” Iser maintains that the reader can infer from a text guiding interpretation. Iser argues that texts provide "sets of instructions" or a "repertoire" that the reader must assemble, so that interpretation depends on both the text and response. Interpretation derives from a combination and interaction, of the text and response forming what Iser calls "the virtual text." As Iser describes it, the text represents an effect that is grasped in the reading process. Iser insist that reading depends on the text and that a theory of response has its foundations on the text.

Leitch explains that in reader-response a text functions as a guide and "readings of literary texts depend on the text but are realized through the process of interpretation... Iser stresses that interpretation is always a result of the dynamic interaction of text and reader. The structure of the literary text guides the reader, but the reader continually modifies his/her viewpoint, connecting new segments of the text and filling in the ‘gaps’ of what the text does not mention. Meaning is not static but constantly revised in a process that Iser compares to a feedback loop in communication theory, resembling what philosophers call ‘the hermeneutic circle’ (Leitch 1672).”

Leitch reports that in the interaction between the text and the reader the study of a literary work should concern not only the actual text but also the actions involved in responding to that text. Iser believed that the text and the reader are far easier to analyze than is the event that takes place between them. This implies that the need for interpretation arises from the structure of interpersonal experience. We have experience of one another insofar as we know one another's conduct; but we have no experience of how others experience us. "I cannot experience your experience... Contact therefore

depends upon our continually filling in a central gap in our experience (Leitch 1675).” It is through their own experiences that students are expected to find understanding in the text.

“The imbalance between text and reader, however, is undefined, and it is this very indeterminacy that increases the variety of communication possible (Leitch 1676).” When it comes to gaps “it is the implications and not the statements that give shape and weight to the meaning (Leitch 1676).” In order to become fully aware of the implication, we must bear in mind that a text is composed of a variety of perspectives, “which outline the author's view and... what the reader is meant to visualize. Such perspectives open a view not only of others, but also of the intended imaginary object (Leitch 1678).” The students, however, may find difficult the process of filling in the blanks difficult due to the fact that they are ESL readers and do not have the same native language as the poet did.

### **Freirian Pedagogy**

Freire (1970) calls for a reappraisal of the meaning and methods of education. Freire's thoughts are described as a counter culture in the search for a definition and method of radical education. Man's vocation according to Freire is realized in his praxis. It is praxis that transforms and expresses the world. It is education that reinforces that determination.

According to Freire a key role lies in the revolutionary educator that challenges both students and reality, which is to be studied by bringing dialogue, examination and appropriation of mediating reality by creating conscious actors who stand in a subject-to-subject relationship to one another. Freire indicates there are people who are trying to

redefine the reality in which we all live. He addressed educators that want to change from a complete academic context into a process of dialogue and mutual learning. Freire wishes for people to be able to control their own destinies.

Freire advocates for a theory and practice based upon authentic dialogue between teachers and learners. The approach centers upon codified representations of the learners' existential situations and leads not only to their acquisition of literacy skills, but more importantly to their awareness of their right and capacity as human beings to transform reality. Becoming literate is truly an act of knowing, through which a person is able to look critically at the culture which has shaped him, and to move toward reflection and positive action upon his world. Experience teaches us not to assume that the obvious is understood. We should be aware that every educational practice implies a concept of man and the world. Orientation in the world places the question of the purposes of action at the level of critical perception of reality. Freire argues that merely teaching men to read and write does not work miracles. "True dialogue unites subjects together in the cognition of a knowable object which mediates between them (Freire 12)." If learning to read and write is to constitute an act of knowing, the learners must assume the role of creative subjects. It is not a matter of memorizing and repeating, but rather of reflecting critically on the process, and on the profound significance of the language. Freire recognizes the indisputable unity between subjectivity and objectivity in the act of knowing. "Reality is ... men's perception of it (Freire 13)."

The educator this philosophy refers to is a knowing subject, face to face with other knowing subjects, is a person constantly readjusting his knowledge, who calls forth knowledge from his students. For this educator education is pedagogy of knowing. To be

an act of knowing, then the literacy process must engage the learners in the constant “problematizing” of their existential situations.

Freire considers the philosophical basis and the social context of his own thought with specific reference to Latin America. "The starting point for such an analysis must be a critical comprehension of man as a being who exists in and with the world (Freire 27)." The basic condition for “conscientization” (See Appendix A) is that its agent must be a subject. "Only beings who can reflect upon the fact that they are determined are capable of freeing themselves ... By their characteristic reflection, intentionality, temporality, and transcendence, men's consciousness and action are distinct from the mere contacts of animals with the world. (Freire 28-29)." Freire explains that "[t]he reflectiveness and finality of men's relationships with the world would not be possible if these relationships did not occur in a historical as well as physical context. Without critical reflection there is no finality, nor does finality have meaning outside an uninterrupted temporal series of events (Freire 31)."

Freire suggests we must avoid objectivism and idealism because they lead to mechanism and solipsism. As the transition becomes more sharply etched then the group becomes more engaged in its social society, rejecting imported schemes and fabricated solutions. The arts gradually cease to be mere expression of the life of the bourgeoisie, and begin to find their inspiration in the hard life of the people. Poets begin to write about more than their lost loves, they speak of the field and the laborer not as abstract and metaphysical concepts, but as concrete men with concrete lives. As the transitional phase intensifies active groups focus more on their national reality in order to know it better and to create ways of overcoming their society's dependency. Revolutionaries must prove

their respect and confidence for the people; they must be in communion with them, as a lover of men he must see the new man being born in the experience of liberation.

Conscientization is a joint project that takes place in a man among men action united by their reflection upon that action and upon the world. Together they achieve the state of perceptive clarity that Freire indicates Goldman calls "‘maximum of potential consciousness’ beyond ‘real consciousness.’" Conscientization is a defense against a threat of potential mythification of the technology that the new society requires to transform its infrastructure. There are two possible directions open to transitive popular consciousness: growth from a naïve state of consciousness and the distortion of the transitive state of consciousness. For revolution to be authentic it must be a continuous event. If we have faith in men, we cannot be content with saying that they are human persons while doing nothing concrete so that they may exist as such (Freire 52)."

Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* perfected a method for teaching illiterates that has contributed to that process. In sharing the troubles of the "wretched of the world" he was able to make a profound influence in the listlessness schools produced. In his struggle he came to realize that the people's ignorance and lethargy was the product of the economic, social and political situation they faced.

As this happens word takes power and is no longer an abstraction but a means by which man discovers himself and his potential. An educated man will see how his eyes have been opened. It is Freire's goal, as it was Blake's, to create social awareness. In responding to changes that occur around them people are likely to take upon themselves changing the structures of the society which had oppressed them.

The method Freire describes seems to be for a world different than ours but there are parallels not to be overlooked. The technology that has programmed us into conformity has created sensitivity to what is happening mixed together with the erosion of old concepts opening the way to an acute awareness of this oppression. Freire aspires for mankind to deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of the world. Freire was aware that the development of an educational methodology would create tension and conflict within society but it could create a contribution to the formation of a new mankind and mark the beginning of a new era.

Freire emphasized Hegel's ideas that the awakening of critical consciousness leads the way to the expression of social discontents because they are the components of an oppressive situation. Freire points out Friori's views that the gravest obstacle to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorb those within it thereby acting to submerge man's consciousness.

According to Freire the only effective instrument of liberation is a humanizing pedagogy in which teachers establish a permanent relationship of dialogues with students. Teachers must avoid manipulating students and allow them to express their consciousness. In attaining knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, teachers and students discover themselves as its permanent re-creators. The teacher can learn from the students as much as the students can learn from their teacher. The solution is to transform the passive structure so that students can become "beings for themselves (Freire 61)." Logically the educator's role is to regulate the way the world "enters into" the students, and in reference to Jean-Paul Sartre to "fill" by making deposits of

information which educators consider to constitute true knowledge. One cannot impose or merely co-exist, solidarity requires true communication, and the concept by which an educator is guided proscribes communication.

The students, no longer being docile listeners, become critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. Freire suggests that the teacher should present the material to the students for their consideration, and then re-consider as the students express their own. "The role of the problem-posing educator is to create, together with the students, the conditions under which knowledge... is superseded by true knowledge (Freire 68)." In doing so students, increasingly presented with problems relating to themselves in the world, will feel challenged to respond because they apprehend the challenge as interrelated to other problems. Their response to the challenge evokes new challenges, followed by new understandings, and gradually students come to regard themselves as committed.

Freire discussed that authentic reflection considers humans in their relations with the world. In problem-posing education, men develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world and the situation in which they find themselves. They come to see the world's reality not as static, but as one in process, in transformation. It is also true that the form of action men adopt is a function of how they perceive themselves in the world. Hence, the teacher and the student reflect simultaneously on themselves and the world, thus establishing an authentic form of thought and action.

Related to reflection is the topic of thematic investigation which Freire states "is a process of search, of knowledge, and creation, that requires the investigators to discover the interpretation of problems, in the linking of meaningful themes. Thus, the process of

searching for meaning should include a concern for the links between themes, a concern to pose these themes as problems, and a concern for their historical-cultural context (Freire 99)." Freire informs that every thematic investigation which deepens historical awareness is educational, while all authentic education investigates thinking. The more educators and people investigate the people's thinking, and are jointly educated, the more they continue to investigate.

Similar in belief to Rosenblatt regarding perceptions Freire states that "While it is normal for investigators to come to the area with values which influence their perceptions, this does not mean that they may transform the thematic investigation into a means of imposing these values (Freire 102)." This critical process implies a correct method of approaching reality in order to unveil as an educational pursuit, and as cultural action.

The first task of the teacher is to present the general program of the educational campaign. In addition, after several days of dialogue with the participants, the educators can ask the participants directly; "What other themes or subjects could we discuss besides these? (Freire 117)." As each replies the answer are noted and proposed to the group as a problem. This teaching campaign is adopted for the last session where we discuss Blake as an artist.

On a similar note, William Blake wrote about the problems his society faced. In reading poetry many become aware of the issues that need to be discussed. Information about the British Romantic period and Blake will serve as background to draw on for developing material concerning the content of the poems and on building students schema for subsequent readings. This way, each activity or task within the reading guide

lead into the next. This will demand that students find a way to understand the turbulent world of the British Romantic period, one of revolution and reaction in which, for poets such as Blake, their world became interwoven with industrial, political, social, economic, spiritual-religious and ethic realities around them. Writers were known for expressing defiance against conformity, and the powers of human potentiality were esteemed.

### **William Blake and the Romantics**

William Blake was not only a poet but he was also known as an engraver, illustrator and drawing teacher. Blake published almost all of his works himself, etched by hand, along with illustrations and images that were decorated onto copper plates. The plates were inked for prints and the prints were colored. It was an expensive and labor intensive process which resulted in a limited circulation of his works. Most consider his graphic art and his writing together. His first printed collection was *Poetical Sketches* in 1783. Later he published *Songs of Innocence* in 1789 and *Songs of Experience* in 1793 followed by a combined edition *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience showing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul* in 1794. Blake disapproved of Enlightenment rationalism, institutionalized religion, and of traditional marriage. He wrote a series of long prophetic books linked together by an intricate mythology and symbolism of his own creation that proposed a revolutionary social, intellectual and ethical order.

Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience* contrast the innocent pastoral childhood against the corruption and repression of the adult world. The songs present the value and limitations of two different perspectives on the world. Many of the poems are in pairs to present views of innocence and experience in hopes to recognize and correct the fallacies of both. His insight is into the way these modes of control work

together to drain what is most holy in human beings. The *Songs of Innocence* dramatize the hopes and fears of children in positive aspects before corrupted by the distortion of experience. The *Songs of Experience* however compensate for some of the blindness of innocence.

The style is simple and direct but the language and rhythm are crafted to be deceptively complex. Often there is Biblical symbolism mixing the traditional with the unfamiliar. Blake used ballads, nursery rhymes, and hymns in his own conceptions to exhort assumptions of human thought and social behavior.

Concerning Blake's writings Hilton (1983) seeks to reevaluate literal perceptions as identified in the writing. Like Rosenblatt, Freire and Eco; Hilton is concerned about the reader and his perception. He indicates that "each word signifies so amply that even so skeletal a structure begins to (bear) meaning as each word finds relation to another. The word (bear) is an example of how ESL students may face confusion in understanding because of the language. While this process occurs initially in the mind of the perceiver, it can develop through and toward structures in the 'mind' of the text, and then further to relations in the 'mind', or episteme, of English and collective imagination (Hilton 3)." This presents the ambiguity of meaning: using the word (bear), can mean to support, carry, transmit, produce or have a visible trait to the biological image of the four legged mammal we are so accustomed to. Hilton serves as a guide for interpreting Blake's poetry, an idea that becomes functional in the development of the reading guide as it considers the role of the reader in the interpretation of the text. Hilton indicates that there are many factors such as content, having knowledge of the author's background, historical background, social background, context, and using visuals that influence

interpretation of a text. He also claims that Blake's work challenges the reader to find the connection between text, reader and author. This was useful information for teaching and for reader-response linking his argument on perception to his different strategies for interpretation. Perception is a key element in reader-response as it influences interpretation. Depending on students' prior knowledge and experiences students are likely to perceive different things as not all have lived the same experiences.

Another valid reference to teaching Blake is Gleckner and Greenberg (1989) who supply the reader with a collection of essays on the topics of materials, instruction, theory, context and point-of-view. They provide approaches to teaching Blake and background information on which to build. Similar to Freire's ideas and the principles of reader-response the aim of these essays is to teach Blake's "readers to think for themselves (Gleckner and Greenberg x)." and free themselves from orthodoxies. Many of the authors of the articles presented in the anthology acknowledge the problem of interpretation, which seems to be not only concerned with the poet's composition but also with the reader as each one may have a different interpretation. One of the aims is exploring ways that can help and stimulate the students' ability to question the text, which is another precept of reader-response and Freirian pedagogy. The different authors suggest that one can focus on a number of different areas to approach the work in class. For instance some express a concern for theme and or subject matter, categorization, sensitivity to art, context such as social, political, historical, religious, artistic and psychological, ideas that can become useful for building students' schema before reading the poems and carrying-out further tasks.

Some of the ways that can help and stimulate students to question the text are presented much like it would be in reader-response. The authors provide a series of questions that teachers can use as guidelines for discussion whereas other authors talk about using audio recordings and visual aids as a means to engage with the piece. In other words, the teachers mix reading with listening, writing, and speaking.

Also in viewing William Blake's work, Wright (2004) discussed that "individual liberty is inseparable from, though often at odds with, the dominant concern of... an engagement with community, particularly national community (Wright xiv)."

"Blake's characters may rail against the dominant order and constraints on individual freedoms, but free individuals are not hermits: they require audiences, fellow citizens, lovers, and families. Blake thus often represents his most oppressed and oppressive characters as solitary figures in bound spaces (Wright xiv)." Wright states that "[i]n the Romantic era nationalism consistently elides individuality within the category of 'national characters' [Wright cites Gellner's phrase,] 'nations maketh man' and corrupts cultural work to further the national agenda rather than challenge, complicate, or supplement it... In Blake's time, nationalism in its modern form was a new phenomenon. Blake was concerned with the ways in which nationalism promulgated by the state and its institutions was not only repressive for the individual, but also a disruption of a nativist art and imagination as the uncorrupted expressions of individuality (Wright xv)."

Like Freire, Wright indicates that in Blake's works "nationalism asks the community to cohere in order to achieve very material and political goals, whether freedom from an oppressor, imperial expansion, economic success, cultural development, or the defense of land and property against an invader. Indeed, all must act as one, or all

parts will be shattered... In other words, the national subject as defined by nationalist ideology is an individual extension of the universalized national character, insofar as each national character is consistent within its respective nation and every nation is presumed to have its own national character (Wright xvi).” Wright reports that as consequence, the struggle between disciplinary pressures and individual desires is frequently a public space in Blake's poetry, [making his] writing radically different.

Wright comments that “[t]he individual life is either constrained by public discourses, or epiphanically frees itself from at least some of those constraints. The characters' private thoughts are always represented by publicly perceived actions, such as speeches, laughter, rejoicing, howling, and cursing, telegraphed as they would be on a stage rather than described by an omniscient narrator with full access to their interiority (Wright xvii).” “Nationalism seeks to establish a communal paradigm as interior and inherent to each subject and, by offering communal power, seeks to set aside any other interiority (Wright xviii).”

When it comes to perception in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake writes, “If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is: infinite, ‘for man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern’ (Wright xx).” This is similar to what Rosenblatt and Freire argued about people being critical thinkers in order to avoid becoming complacent.

“The unfamiliar, the irreconcilable, halts the chain of substitutions mapped by the code, making possible the production of other codes and metacodes, including the recognition of the codedness of the reading process (Wright xxi).”

"In the antiquarian controversies of Blake's day, cultures of the distant past were represented in ways that validated particular views of the nationalist culture of the hoped-for future. Liberty became a critical concept (Wright 30)." Blake opposes the classical and values the gothic culture and Hebraic tradition, "while deprecating the rationalist and classical culture as one of laws, constraints, and militarist imperialism foreign to the 'true British identity it corrupts' (Wright 31)."

Blake "consistently seeks to tear away the constructs that inhibit the resurrection of the legitimate political subject from its suppressed traces (Wright 33)." One notices in his early works that history disjunctively plots the fall of society, not its gradual progress. In his poems this is also observed. The revolutionary resurrection of an essential identity shows two crucial figures: that of the prophet and bard, and Blake created a "prophet-bard hybrid" that bears the marks of atemporality, discontinuity and irony. This "prophet-bard hybrid" gives declarations of the present, past and future, which he sees. His task is to "forge a connection between a latent national character and the lost culture in which that character enjoyed its full expression (Wright 35)."

Wright includes an excerpt from *Of a National Character in Literature* (1818) that implies the role schema plays in one's life and the principles of experiences that are called upon in reader-response.

What he then felt resembled that wild and delightful impression with which a traveler finds himself on a foreign shore, where all that he sees is alike strange - with one entire power subverts his previous associations, and violently, as it were, throws open his mind to a sense of new existence, and to the apprehension of a

new world.

In *Jerusalem*, Los's declaration "I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Mans" calls upon Rosenblatt's previous point on conforming to ideas when not being a critical thinker, which is similar to Freire's notion of being enslaved by society. As Wright puts it; to create one's own system is to be isolated, unless, one creates a system that enslaves others. In poems like *Visions* and *Europe*, the reader is placed in an alienated position, being able to see the systems that are unable to recognize each other, is placed on the edges of all.

Wright provides us with an insight into Blake as a poet which can aid in understanding. This information aids the reader in gaining insight into the poet and artist. However, students are not expected to know about Blake or look for outside sources in order to understand his poems. It is not required because that would be against reader-response but students are not denied the use of sources if they find it necessary. Having a student-centered focus they are responsible for their learning.

When it comes to reading Wright quotes Gowin "That the impression we derive from a book, depends less upon its real contents, than upon the temper of mind and preparation with which we read it (Wright 142)." This concept is similar to Lawson's perception of Blake's world and his poetry.

Lawson (1993) believes that William Blake stands for something worldly. Indicating that in spite of the reputation he had as a mystic, his early poems were naturalistic and he showed down-to-earth concerns. Lawson states that for Blake the biblical account of the fall of humanity does not involve original sin. "Humanity's alienation is overcome by imagination, 'which can return us to our original wholeness.'

Therefore sin is missing and its equivalent is selfhood, a state of attempted self-sufficiency, in isolation, following fragmentation from Universal Man. Blake's modes of communication via visual art and poetry are more than abstractions of philosophy. Still, his central concern with the one universal man echoes the philosophical question of the One and the Many (Lawson)." Blake's assault on reason displeased humanists with their rationality. Lawson argues that Blake's concern is to inveigh against a creator-god who rules in the name of mechanization and measurement. "Unless we feel that with his terminology, Blake deprecates nature or opposes humankind, we need to see that his 'Vala' (nature) can be humanized by imagination (Lawson)." This is allusive to Freire's idea of man making sense of his world in order to become a part of it. In knowing that Blake was influenced by his society Mulvihill, also discusses Blake's writing in terms of his times.

Mulvihill (2000) indicates that Blake's poems narrate a history of larger scope than that of The French Revolution. Blake is not unique among Romantic writers in his compulsion to push narrative beginnings back further. Other Romantics pushed for totality but a narrative art like Blake's perhaps represents such impulse in its most determined form.

Mulvihill indicates Blake seems to consider events to be the definitive historical category. The history behind the representation is either an ideal category or "total history." Blake's model includes by implication facts rendered "improbable or impossible" in the system of Whig history. Mulvihill suggests that for Blake historical recovery is a mediated process. Mulvihill indicates that whether figured as the Natural

State or a diluvian Ur-mythology, the common origin is a master trope governing the narrative patterns of civil history and euhemerist mythology alike.

Mulvihill discussed the idea that priority is problematic for Blake because it is a contingent category. Blake's preoccupation with states is psychological, "his dislike of Enlightenment history ensures that they are not called stages--the temporal structures of his narratives betray the historian's sometimes reluctant, sometimes eager, resort to periodization. [Mulvihill cites Kellner who can only express confusion], [t]his is not what I would call a human scale of explanation (Mulvihill 64)," and yet Mulvihill explains this is Blake's scale of explanation, from *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience* onwards.

Total history is a notion insofar as representation is concerned, but real enough as a phenomenal category,--as experience, everywhere at every time. Everything that has happened, has happened, everything that has been experienced, has been experienced; it is a fallacy only to assume that it all can be represented. Yet Romanticism is characterized by such aspirations

Greer (2001) in accord with Lawson states that though ridiculed as a madman in his own time, and even in ours, William Blake developed a singular vision of the world, truth, and eternity that fascinates viewers. Similar to Mulvihill, Greer argues that the idea of "seeing the world in a grain of sand" comes from his "Auguries of Innocence." Greer informs that Blake left a visual legacy, from which images are familiar to people who know little or nothing of his literary or artistic works. According to Greer, Blake was an example of the Romantic-era artist who was unsuccessful, poor, and regarded with indifference by contemporaries, yet was later recognized as an eccentric genius. Greer

informs that Blake lived a quiet, almost reclusive life, devoting himself with dedication to visual and literary labors that in his time were sniffed at, as little more than symptoms of madness. He saw things, but not the things that his contemporaries saw. Using a system of relief engraving and printing of his own invention he illustrated, and published massive epic poems based on a largely self-created mythology. This mythology was an alloy of biblical imagery, Greek myths, pseudo-Celtic history, and his acute insights into what he called eternal truth. Greer claims that because of these things many saw Blake as a madman and not in any true sense an artist. "Blake is all the more strange, given his mastery of words and poetic form, bolstered by his use of a remarkable and self-invented visual language to communicate his vision of the world, time, and eternity (Greer)." Greer believes Blake's work fits better into our own contemporary scene than into the crowd of painters and illustrators of his time.

According to Greer, Blake attempted to embody the identity of the English nation in poetic and symbolic terms using a curious blend of biblical, druidic, and invented imagery. Blake was a multifaceted artist and poet, whose work shows his vision of heaven and hell, juxtaposition of innocence and experience, and flirtation with the revolutionary sentiments of the late eighteenth century. Greer indicates that Blake included characters whose "substance can never suffer nor decay." Blake's peculiar talent was to catch in visual and verbal terms the substance perceived by the mind's eye beyond suffering and decay.

On a similar note Wagenknecht (2004) informs that "Blake was unwilling to accept the... notion that the individual could have ontological priority outside human history and could hence be taken for granted as the transcendental and transhistorical

basis for liberty (Wagenknecht)." This is allusive to Freire's ideas about man searching for freedom; a freedom that is obtained through critical process and dialogue. Wagenknecht reports that Makdisi felt from antinomianism that Blake alienated himself from his own time while coming close to being anti-historical. Blake, Makdisi believes, derived his vision and techniques for expression by a careful mimesis of the society from which he strove to extricate himself, and boiled down into a "subversive slang" (Wagenknecht 87) born of his culture's "ideologemes." Makdisi remarks that Blake knew about industrial production because he was a "producer" himself and was in an ideal position to understand why the techniques of mechanized production, "reveal a 'logic of organization' that leans towards synonymizing economic progress with the evolution of 'unitary psychobiological subjectivity in an expanded social, political and cultural domain' (Wagenknecht 11)."

For Wagenknecht it was not possible, that "the dark satanic mill ... is a figure not just of the organization of production in early industrial society, but also of the social, political, and religious constitution of the individual psychobiological subject... because [Blake] proposes ... is a kind of freedom--into the infinite--that is ultimately incompatible with the unitary subject and with bourgeois society ... (Wagenknecht 145)."

Gilpin (2004) just as Greer concerning Blake's writing and his society discusses Blake's *Bible of Hell* which according to him satirizes theories of creation favored by the reason-bound and theoretical science of the Enlightenment. The abstraction and inhumanity of science and philosophy had been a target of Blake. In Blake's satiric works such as *The Book of Urizen* (1794) there are ... designs, representing beings human, demoniac, and divine, in situations of pain and sorrow and suffering. Blake first provides

allusions to moral counterpoints that reveal Urizen as a false creator of grotesque scientific work. According to Gilpin, this is a parody of the King James translation of Genesis.

Blake's Los, in response to this scientific sacrilege, would take the role of the "ancient Poets," described in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, who "animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling them by the names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their enlarged & numerous senses could perceive (Plate II)." Gilpin states that without sensation the mind could not be formed, nor could we reason.... The sad irony of Blake's satire is that every artist must be part of the fallen world that he seeks to understand. Los reacts to what he has made in Urizen with incredulity and horror, Urizen in his dissections destroys any sense of the natural world's unity and beauty, and his fate is to recapitulate Los's fall, division, and decline."

Gilpin also discussed *The Book of Ahania* (1795), where the element of fire is associated with images of thunderstorms and lightning that might represent the emerging scientific interest in experiments with electrical discharge and conductors. According to Gilpin what Blake does accomplish is a clear identification of the errors in the thinking of unholy priests of Enlightenment science--their stagnant pride, meaningless abstraction, spiritual vacuity, and practical inhumanity. Gilpin states that "to counter these images with innocent and sentimental views of human beings as reminders of what is lost as Urizen's reign proceeds. The maternal and infant figures... appear fluid and free, and continue the motif of playful figures begun in *Songs of Innocence*... [Then there] is a disturbing picture of the London streets described and illustrated by Blake in *Songs of*

*Experience* (Gilpin 22).” With these exceptional designs, Blake reminds his reader of *The Book of Urizen*, with poignancy and sadness, of the world of human distress and pain to which enlightened science, for all its empiricism and "progress," remains indifferent.

In knowing about Blake’s personal style we gain access into the poet and why in comparison to his contemporaries he is set apart. As Applebaum had discussed Blake did not belong to the neoclassicism of the eighteenth century nor to the phases of Romanticism. He had no poetic school or age because he was radical. To know what set him apart from the rest we have to know of the times he lived in. This is best suited for personal insight into the poet rather than to use within the classroom due to the fact that the focus is placed in the students understanding of the poet and his texts rather than on the application that students have for it, which students may not require within the reader-response approach to Blake’s poetry.

### **The Romantic Period**

Information about the British Romantic period and Blake serve as background to draw on for developing material concerning the content of the poems and on building students schema for subsequent readings. This way each activity or task within the reading guide leads into the next. Abrams and Greenblatt (2000) provide information regarding the historical background of the British Romantic period as they contribute facts of political and social movements that occurred during the period as well as Blake's background and ideologies.

The Romantic period from 1785-1830 was a time in which the agricultural society of England experienced tension regarding matters of power and wealth. Economy fluctuated as a result of inflation, depression and the shift brought about by the French

and American Revolutions. The newly made social arrangements demanded changes in the political status as the working class requested improvements within the government. People had been left to pursue their own interests but this left the working class in inadequate conditions. The wages were unjust; women and children were forced to labor under sordid conditions that destroyed body and spirit. Workers lacked the right to vote and were prevented from unionizing.

Writers sought to renew the world they experienced. Reason was a way to transcend and reach the infinite and that desire to go beyond human limitations enforced their ideas of refusing to submit. Similarly poetry became a form of critical manifestos or expressions of principles. Poets presented a portrait of human life while instructing and pleasing the reader. The source of the poem was located within the feelings and the mind of the author. Blake was one that "described a poem as an embodiment of the poet's imaginative vision, which they opposed to the ordinary world of common experience (Norton 7)."

This last expression demonstrates that Blake was not only aware of his audience but that the reader held an important role in the interpretation of the ideas exposed which not only provides a link to building schema but to reader-response as the reader is given a chance to express him/herself on what he/she thinks are the poet's ideas. The poem is an expression of the poet's ideas and the students reflect on the poet's expression. Rosenblatt had pointed out this concept concerning the instruction of poetry. This information can become necessary for the reader and the students in the interpretation of the poems that are being used as the poems require the reader to be aware of the social context in which

the poems were written, information that 3202 students lack thus making the poems difficult for them.

Another source concerning the topic of teaching Blake is Paley (1969), which offers a collection of articles that share their interpretations and/or suggestions for teaching different poems within *The Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. All seem to agree that experience is one of the qualities undergone in life, which would create a link to reader-response as schemata would be the influencing factor in allowing the reader to connect with the poem. The essays contained in the book aim to emphasize that Blake's work was full of meaning and elaboration. The aim of the articles is to stimulate readers to make and criticize their own interpretation, which is one of the principles of reader-response. In accordance with reader perception they also seem concerned about the "impression his verse makes on the unprepared reader" as cited by Paley, (Ostriker 10).

Theoretical work in the areas of reader-response, Freirian pedagogy, William Blake and the Romantic period shows that educators need to vary the ways in which they teach ESL students for them to succeed in their own education. The primary principle is for students to become independent learners during their process of understanding by searching for the information they need. This builds a theoretical background to develop strategies that focus on obtaining genuine reader-responses and improving analytical reading skills through reading guides. Reader-response theory, Freirian pedagogy and Blake share similar views in terms of providing people with the skills they need in order to become critical members of society. This idea shapes the methodology that provides answers for this study based on findings from small-group discussions and students' responses.

## Chapter Three

### Methodology and Findings

This chapter provides a brief description of the materials used, the subjects and the setting. The reading guide (See Appendix B) was created by revising and developing materials used in a pilot study conducted during the first semester of the academic year 2004-2005. The tasks were applied and designed by planning and providing a flexible and responsive situation. Participants were observed during the natural process of teaching to critically reflect on reader-response theory and Freirian pedagogy for teaching Blake's poetry.

#### **Materials**

The materials used for the application during the sessions came from *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* 7th ed. vol. 2, as source for the teaching guide. This anthology included some of William Blake's poems out of which handouts of the poems were provided. The poems used were: *The Lamb* and *The Tyger* for purposes of looking at comparison and contrast, and *Nurses Song*, and *Holy Thursday* for purposes of discussing content and context. The poems discussed are used as a means of comparing the changes made by Blake within the state of innocence and the state of experience.

The materials were chosen by examining what worked, what didn't and what was learned during the pilot study the previous semester, which was conducted with a 3202 class for a period of three class sessions. The students read a variety of poems from different periods and authors without a reading guide.

This approach of reader-response theory and Freirian pedagogy worked as an assessment and application tool for the reading guide due to its flexibility in promoting understanding allowing informed teaching and learning.

The design was developed after information was gathered concerning reader-response theory, literature on the Romantic period, William Blake, approaches to teaching Blake and guides on the development of teaching material and Freirian pedagogy. The reading guide (See Appendix B) was designed to help ESL students at the Basic English level in higher education with the skills needed for understanding literary study. During application responses were collected to analyze and consider what must be changed or emphasized for the benefit of the students.

### **Subjects**

The subjects for this study were 46 students at the University of Puerto Rico - Mayagüez Campus; they were mainly students of engineering, agricultural sciences, humanities and business administration. The subjects were taking the required sequence of English courses beginning with Basic English (3101-3102) or Pre-Basic English (066). They were in the last semester of the required sequence and were between their second year and senior year of their Bachelors degree. Students that are placed into this sequence received a score between 470 and 569 on the English as a Second Language Achievement Test (ESLAT) or they have successfully completed Pre-Basic English, a non-credit course they were placed into because their ESLAT score was below 470. The aim of the course was to help students develop the ability to read a variety of genres and write according to a variety of rhetorical modes such as responses, research papers and essays.

Of the 46 students enrolled, this thesis reflects the work of 12 students who came to class on a regular basis and produced from 8 to 13 written responses.

The students determined the number of responses they would do. The parameters given were that they should at least write an initial and final response to each of the six poems read. No grades were given because in order to assign a grade the students would have had to commit to guidelines and a grading rubric would have been applied, which would have meant a loss of freedom. Instead students were offered two bonus points for each of the responses they turned-in.

### **Duration**

Data was collected during the second semester of the academic year 2004 – 2005 for a period of two weeks following a Monday, Wednesday and Friday schedule. The duration of the study on Blake's poetry was six 50 minute class sessions.

### **Limitations for Acceptable Responses**

Even within reader-response it is also important to determine what is expected for students to understand to help determine whether they have approached the poems correctly. Without prior identification of what is acceptable, one is not able to determine who has stepped out of the boundaries of understanding. Discussions and responses are expected within the content of the poems. Discussion of style or form is not expected since this was not discussed prior to application, and it is not the main focus of understanding.

The collections of *The Songs of Innocence and of Experience* include a varying arrangement of poems. In the *Songs of Innocence* Blake's stance was one that incorporated injustice, suffering and evils of the fallen world expressed through simple

pastoral language as is depicted in an innocent and happy world. In the *Songs of Experience* we see a world of poverty, prostitution, disease, war, sexual repressions, and institutions.

In response to *The Lamb* it is expected that students point out the use of questions. The speaker is a child, and is concerned with the origin of another creature. The child provides an answer to his own questions. There is a blessing at the end indicating this child's beliefs. The poem has a focus on abstract spiritual matters. It concerns Christian faith and acceptance. Although an innocent child, he presents a timeless concept in human nature; a source of origin. The lamb itself is used in allusion to Jesus as a symbol of religious values. Through the child's eyes the universe is capable of good, showing innocence and goodness. If anything is to be noticed on the form and style, it could be that it sounds like a refrain.

In its counterpart *The Tyger*, like in the poem *The Lamb*, the questions are the central key for the poem. It presents the tiger as a fearsome creature. The poem alludes to the creator as a blacksmith. Nature is seen as a work of art. The capacity for violence is what is shown as an evil existence within the world. The nature of God as creator is also questioned. *The Tyger* is symbolic for the spiritual and moral problems of the world. The figure of the tiger is attached to an imagery of fire. Fire has connotations of creation, purification and destruction. The metaphor implies that the power resides within us to be good or to be bad; our actions have consequences. The same Supreme Being that made the lamb created the tiger. The unanswered questions make the reader question the complexity of creation. Certain things in the world can neither be denied nor explained. The speaker appears to be an adult.

In response to *Nurses Song from Innocence* students should notice that there are children playing and their nurse tells them they have to go but gives in to their desire to stay. The students are expected to notice the innocent and simple joy that is expressed. The nurse as the adult figure also appears to be happy and is only there to look out for the children's wellbeing. The children are described as if they were part of nature themselves. The speaker is the adult describing the children she cares for. If students notice anything about the form or style, it could be the rhyming pattern.

The counterpart, *Nurses Song from Experience*, includes a speaker that is reminiscing upon her childhood. While the children play all day, she faces responsibilities. This nurse is not as content as the first one. Because of her remarks, she appears as bad in front of the children but she is actually looking out for their best interest. Things appear to be different from the earlier poem. The children do not appear to be as small as before; they do not seem to need her as much but she still worries that they are not aware of how harsh the real world can be.

In response to *Holy Thursday from Innocence* one can notice that it is Ascension Day, the 40th day after the resurrection of Christ although one might not expect students to point out this information. The speaker indicates that it is the day that the children are cleansed and dressed whereas they were dirty before this. They are in St. Paul's Cathedral and they are looked after by the leaders of the church. Questioning of the religious sector is subtle but present in the poem. There is also a social condition of poverty presented since they are referred to as having been an eyesore. The children are taken to church to praise God. The children appear to be lambs looking for their shepherd's guidance and mercy. Obedience and acceptance are also noted as well as desperation. Pity and

hypocrisy are other topics that are alluded to. The children are presented as fragile, naive and in need of help for which reason they fail to see corruption. Criticism is implied as religion is institutionalized and there is despotism detected in authority figures. The poem shows that we are all God's children regardless of wealth and status. The metaphor is; follow me as children do and the kingdom of heaven shall be granted. The speaker is an adult describing the cruelty to which the children are subjected. If anything is to be noted about the form, it is that its long lines resemble the multitude coming into church. There is also rhyme.

Similarly, *Holy Thursday from Experience* focused on the same notions of the earlier poem. The difference is that this one is shorter and the images presented are more forceful as they request an urgent call to action. The poem is seen as a continuation of the first. The criticism is explicit instead of implied. The speaker states that the impoverished destitute condition of the societies is unlikely to change and therefore will continue to be an eyesore and a burden upon the country. The children described in the poem are victims of their social condition. The institutions commit great injustices. Self-interest is expressed rather than the pity that was exclaimed in the first. It is implied that aiding the poor is a civic duty and obligation that should not be neglected. The thorns are also seen as an allusion to Christ in his suffering. People need more than food to survive. Many refuse to intervene because they would rather enjoy plenitude by driving others to poverty.

The students were expected to respond within aforementioned limits since even within the freedom of reader-response they were expected to point out details given within the poems.

## **Classroom Practice and Findings**

Aside from the materials in Appendix B, the reading guide, it is also important to take into consideration the reading guide that students were expected to follow (See Appendix C, Guide Questions for *The Lamb* and *The Tyger*). The first step concerns sharing initial responses where students express the first ideas they gather upon reading the poems. Groups of 3 – 5 students rotated every class in order to provide them with the opportunity to work with other students rather than becoming complacent with one group. Students in the groups share an initial response (observation, statement of feelings aroused by the poem, or expressions such as like, dislike, don't understand, am puzzled). This helps the teacher observe students in their engagement with the text. It also allows the teacher to notice what areas may need to be clarified or discussed further. The diversity in responses also allows members of the group to realize that what they gather from the poems may not be as obvious as what each thinks. As suggested by Rosenblatt and Dias, sharing initial responses in small groups is helpful because responses do not have to be immediately justified.

### **Small-Group Discussions Days 1 - 4**

The small-group discussions were used as a means of developing independent readers of poetry. The discussions reveal students' attention to the text and a desire to arrive at meaning through a process of exploration as students review tentative ideas in collaboration. These show a gradual development of independent performance among the students involved: showing confidence in their responses, tolerance for ambiguity, negotiations for meaning, individual reading strategies, and willingness to change the minds of others within the group.

During the discussion of *The Lamb* students noted and pointed out samples from the poems that gave evidence to their ideas. In their discussion they said that the poem showed a process of questioning and that it was uncommon to start with a question. If the questions were within the poems, something important was implied. Some students pointed out the rhyme, repetition of words and sounds. They agreed it sounded like a song. The main situation described was that of a conversation. It talks about God, they said. Students also questioned the character of the speaker, because according to them the speaker must have been at a significant point in his life in order to make an attempt to identify the personality of God. One said: "We are made in God's image the Bible says. Therefore we also have to think that God has a personality, has thoughts and motives for the decisions made, but the decisions have more power than our own because being God there is control to change all and make all. We cannot make (meaning create) as God can." Immediately after the students had gotten into their small-groups, they began to share ideas. They worked well and only approached me to ask about "thee & thou" because it was not used in contemporary literature. The other group also agreed that it was about God. One student said: "It should be since it makes an allusion to Jesus." Another student pointed out: "The Bible says we are Lambs and Jesus is God's Lamb." Students also talked about the uncommon vocabulary words.

In discussing *The Tyger* a student in one of the groups asked for confirmation of his idea that the speaker was questioning the creator as one of power in making two completely different and destructive creatures. "Why is it that he does that?" He described what we envision a tiger to be like - fearsome and deadly - but then in *The Lamb* what we question is a good figure, something fragile and harmless. In discussion

some students had insights about religion and belief; most made similar comments. They agreed that the poems discussed creation. Students also compared and contrasted the figures of the lamb and how they differed from what both animals usually represent to us. They used their stereotyped ideas about the animals to talk about them. One student mentioned it reminded him of *The Zebra Story Teller*. Students noted that both animals were created with a different purpose but it was their opposition that connected them. One is good but the other creates fear. Students then agreed that it was God to whom the speaker referred and whom the speaker addressed. They said that the animals and the creator had a relationship to us in the sense that we are also capable of both qualities. We could serve for good or evil. Therefore the poems were seen as a comparison between good and evil. The other group focused mostly on the vocabulary and argued about the context in which the words were used. This group worked at a textual level, and commentaries were rather literal from what they gathered of the text. Some questioned the poems' meaning as they discussed ideas about good and evil. Students then began to include in their discussion allusions to the Bible. A student quoted from a verse in Jeremiah King James Version although he could not provide the exact chapter numbers.

When *Holy Thursday* was covered, many of the students went back and forth between their personal responses so they could share with the group. Some students were writing as others expressed their ideas about the poems. Many students were questioning the text and asked: "but why?, what does that mean?, why would he say that?" Students also made comments on the relationship the poems held to *The Lamb* and *The Tyger*. In discussion students talked about hypocrisy, faith, and the rich versus the poor. They also commented that those problems are still faced today. One student said that "the church

only gives 10% of its total earnings in offerings to the poor.” Another said: “the poems remind me of the commercials on television for the Christian Funds that ask people to save the children now because they are in desperate need.” Others talked about the similarities and differences between both versions of the poems. Some students came to the conclusion that either rich or poor both are lacking in something.

Regarding *Nurses Song* students talked about getting protection from darkness. They discussed their own families and experiences growing-up as others watched over them. Most talked about their parents being over-protective, but, as they said, the reality is that they cannot always be there. Some discussed the boundaries between protection and being over-protective. As one student said: “how do you know when to let go?” Other students talked about innocence during childhood in contrast to becoming older and hiding what is being done out of fear and shame. Others argued that the major theme of the poem was how people evolve in the phases they face throughout their lives. Students in the other session asked themselves whether *The Songs of Innocence* and *The Songs of Experience* were part of the relationship between the poems as they had the same titles and topics. In discussion the students noted that both poems concerned views from happy times or innocence, but in experience, although the theme is the same, the focus was on life’s reality. “It shows how things really are rather than what they appear to be in a period of our lives.” One student commented: “the way I see things now is different from how I saw things before. Before I did not have worries, I was taken care of and only had to worry about myself. My biggest worry then was what games I would play and now I have to worry about bills and my family’s wellbeing.” Many said they “connected” with the poems. One student said the poems shared similar issues.

In the following session students seemed rather involved in discussion. Some discussed *Holy Thursday* and others discussed *Nurses Song* or charity and abandoned children. Students discussed whether charitable acts should occur more than once a year; they concurred that they should. They also discussed the idea of the poor being a burden on the wealthy and concluded they were since that is what the taxes are for and where the idea of “cupones” came from. The poems were seen as a critique on the foundations for helpless children. This issue was also of concern to them. The discussion for that day focused on whether we gave charity out of desire or civic duty? Is food enough for the poor or should more be done to help? Should the conditions of the poor be improved or should they continue to suffer while others enjoy plenitude? Where do we draw the lines with what we consider extreme conditions? Is child labor an extreme condition? Is the life we live a lie? When we give charity, is it out of pity for the less fortunate? Does the poem or do the children evoke God in heaven as a plea for compassion for their need? Concerning *Nurses Song* students seem to believe that happiness and a time free of worries and responsibilities fades as we mature from childhood to adulthood. Students also discussed what we expect from the nurse or as they said “the nanny” and what the image usually implies to us.

Students became accustomed to working in small-groups and worked better than on their own. They voiced their ideas and made connections to things in their lives in order to make sense of the poems. The students demonstrated critical thinking and commented that they no longer feared poetry and were starting to like it. Also they appeared willing to work and did not use outside sources, biographies or even dictionaries in order to discuss the poems. Students in both sessions came to similar

conclusions. Both groups agreed that the issues seen in *Holy Thursday* and *Nurses Song* are still relevant today. Students also pointed out allusions to the Bible, heaven and hell, but these were fewer than with *The Lamb* and *The Tyger*. In each lesson students felt more confident about working with poetry.

### **Discussion of Reporting Back Day 5**

After sharing the initial response where students carried-out small-group discussion, students entered into a phase of reporting back to the class, which ensures that the group will work towards arriving at some statement about their sense of the poem, as students understood that their own contributions were not the final word but an important part of the collaborative process. Their responsibility in this step was to report what others within the group said about the poem. In having to report back to the large group students from the small-group had to act as reporters. Each student acted as reporter at least once by drawing from the small-group a statement that best represented their sense of the poem. The reporter had to keep account of what others said. Others helped if assistance was needed for something the reporter might have missed.

The art projects are selected for a reporting back sample of what is presented during this portion of the class because it best summarizes the ideas that were shared amongst the students during the small-group discussions. Students had been asked to create an art project as a means for them to gain an insight into being an artist and expressing ideas. The class projects were varied and colorful; most students selected *The Lamb*, others *Holy Thursday*. They created their art projects with other students from one of the previous sessions. For the report students offered a synopsis of the discussions they had held in previous classes while reporting back to the group.

For *The Lamb* the students discussed the symbol of Christ, and the concept of creation. They also talked about the importance of the lettering in its counterpart poem as a spiritual reason for which to question existence. Students said: “God is the creator of all; it all has a purpose and we are his children, like the shepherd, he takes care of us.” Students expressed that the mode of questioning within the poems was used as a means to infer upon God’s creative powers. The collage of the first group included cut-outs of different images reflected in the poems. The other group that selected the poem had a similar discussion. The difference was that they used excerpts from the poem to provide examples. The other group also held a discussion of a similar nature to the previous two; the difference was that this group focused on innocence and said it was pure, fair and uncorrupted. They identified God as the creator and their discussion was cyclical in the sense that they explained that there is nature; there is life, and children who have the key to heaven. “As said in the Bible if we want to get in, we have to be as they are, simple in heart and willing to love and follow God.” The last group also did a collage but cut their discussion short because they felt the other group had already covered the ideas that they also wanted to express. The other group faced the same situation but they talked about the relationship of the lamb to Jesus and stated that “the Bible says that he has sacrificed himself for us to give us the kingdom of heaven.” They said that life should be valued and not taken for granted. The next group that created a collage emphasized that the others had already covered all the important points and that they agreed with what was said but they wanted to add that the lamb is presented as white because it is also seen as a sign of peace.

For *Nurses Song* students in the first group developed a letter. The students said that the nurse was a symbol. In the letter students talked about the conditions and aspects of life that affect us and how important it is to have them in our life. They also referred to another poem of contemporary times titled *From a Mother to her Child*. One student said that when he read the poem, he thought of the movie *The Pianist*, particularly the scenes where mothers are trying to protect their children and are not able to do so. The other group that discussed the poem developed a collage. Their discussion was based on the connection that was seen to the environment. The students believed childcare was reflected in the poem for an important reason, and that the environment became a symbol for imagination and the role it plays over our lives.

For *Holy Thursday* one group developed a letter from the perspective of a child. The letter talked about the unfair treatment that the child was receiving. The students said that they chose this form in order to make us reflect upon this issue in our lives. According to them there are issues such as this one that we ignore and oftentimes it is not until a child points it out that we begin to feel pity over the situation they are in. "We feel that children are innocent and should be able to enjoy their childhood, we feel that we should protect them. Human life is important and it should not be neglected, especially children who should be nurtured rather than overlooked." The other group that selected the poem made a collage. They presented the poem by means of comparison and presented the similarities between the poem in *Songs of Innocence* and the one in *Songs of Experience*. They discussed the poem's allusions to religion and discussed the subject of peace, life, food, children, charity, misery and poverty. They said that both poems complemented each other. The students indicated that "we have a problem in our world

that should not be ignored; if we want the world to change it is up to us to take the first step in improving charity. It is our moral duty to help those in need.” As an example they talked about the beggars that ask for money outside of the “Colegio.” They said that some people choose to ignore them, some questioned what the money may be used for (drugs or liquor) but those who do give do so out of religious teachings they have learned or because they cannot stand to see others suffer. They have perhaps also felt hunger and cold. The other group that discussed the poem talked about innocence with reference to the Bible and they said that there are several verses in the Bible that discuss the different issues and topics that we have seen throughout the different poems read. The students compared both versions in discussion of the topic of sadness and they made reference to the concept of genocide and Hitler as an example of when things reach a negative extreme. Students said: “Blake wanted us to reflect on the issues that we face in life and the problems in our society that need to be fixed and still plague us today.” They also explained the general concept we have about innocence and experience. They considered the feeling was a lot more than textual. They questioned the group in order to gain participation and made the students question their beliefs, their society and their actions.

One group made a collage that combined *Nurses Song* and *Holy Thursday*. The students believed that these poems read together got a point across more clearly. They presented the children’s situation in both and compared happiness vs. misery, love vs. carelessness. The students also discussed compassion, suffering and the roles of the adults in both poems. They presented the role of adulthood as society expects us to be. They talked about our responsibility to provide care vs., providing cruelty. What is uncommon about this group is that they selected different poems rather than the obvious

choice of comparing counterparts. They also started first with the differences and then the similarities whereas most people present the similarities first.

From these presentations it could be observed that conclusions were similar and the students worked to complement each other. The students' conclusions are within acceptable positions and they have reached expectations. This worked well in opening the lines of communication and interaction. The students were the center and they underwent a learning process in which they took charge of what they acquired from the poems. What they grasped appeared to be meaningful because they related what they had read to their personal lives and background. They also activated their schemata by making reference to other things that were similar and they had read or experienced prior to having read the poems. They did not use outside sources but rather developed or applied reading skills in order to provide details. In the small-groups students kept re-reading the poems as they gathered details for discussion, which helped them during the reporting back session. This research in teaching literature also demonstrated how students in our selected audience have been influenced with regard to how they look at literature using what they have brought from their native language and their religious culture. For example, they could all relate to Christian faith and many used the Bible as a source for understanding. Within this ESL environment I believe it is best to select literature that the students can relate to or that presents issues that they face and can comment on. Students were more talkative and willing to respond during the use of reader-response theory than they were in previous sessions that focused on lecture which they could not really relate to. Students produced more, and became more engaged, alert and critical of the group than they would individually.

### **Discussion of the Blake Archive Day 6**

The last class session covered students' presentations of their art projects. On the last session the slides from The Blake Archive could not be shown because of technical difficulties; instead the print-outs were passed-around so that students could see them. It was explained to students that Blake was not only a poet but an artist who had devised an etching on copper plates printing method. I asked students how they felt about the drawings. Students commented that the style did not look contemporary. One student in each group also noted that there were many on the same poem. I asked students if they believed that anything would have been different had they seen the poems with the pictures from the beginning. In both groups they replied that they would have probably had an easier time because they would have used the pictures to look for clues to understanding the poems message. I asked students if they noticed anything else about the plates. In both groups they replied that the colors were different in each plate. Some students asked why. I asked if they had any suggestions. They thought about it for a while and then a few raised their hands. The first student to speak said: "If you put them all together it looks like the progression of the day, from morning until night." As one in the other section said: "It looks like the changes in the day from morning to evening." I asked if there was anything else. In both sections students also noted that the colors appeared to express mood. I asked how so, and in one group one replied that it had to do with the tone of the poem. In the other section a student said it expressed a feeling. For example *The Lamb* uses light colors and *The Tyger* uses dark ones. Another student added, "like the poems the colors talk about different things; one is the light of good and the other is for bad." Among other things, students also noted that "the tiger does not look like he is

described in the poem.” Another student said: “He kind of even looks like the lamb,” while others added, “it does not inspire fear,” “it looks like a cat.” Others said it looked like it had a teddy bear’s face (meaning stuffed animal). Students also commented on the use of nature. They could see something about nature in every picture. Another student commented on the fashion of the clothing. “It must present what they wore during that time. It is different from now. Now we have freedom to dress as we please.” In the other section a student said that it looked like their clothes were fancy. “The clothes are formal for being at play in *Nurses Song* and it looked the same for *Holy Thursday*. Now we just dress-up for special occasions.” Students also noted that the drawings were elaborate and they had a lot of details. In one session one said, “The plates appear to tell the story of the poem.” Students also noted that in the pictures there are always boys. In one section one made the remark that “the boys have feminine features, by looking at the face it’s like a girl, but you know that a girl would not dress that way and perhaps less in those days.”

### **Poetry Journals**

The poetry journal entries are a very important part in helping to determine the value of reader-response theory in teaching Blake. It is intended as a source of data and as a means to reinforce the notion that newer understanding can emerge from later re-readings. The journals were not highly structured but rather used a stream-of-consciousness type of writing. Students were asked to keep a daily poetry-response journal during the group discussion phase (See Appendix C, Procedure for Journal Entries for Students). They were also to set aside each evening after they had taken the English class enough time to reread the poems they had discussed that day and write their response. The response should include the feelings that the poem evoked in them and

their understanding of the poem, given that sufficient time had elapsed for them to have reconsidered, confirmed, or questioned further their experience of the poem. They were to comment on as many aspects of the poem as they could account for and clarify.

From the student responses gathered it was noted that students used religious imagery from background knowledge they had prior to the course. Neither Christian imagery nor theology was discussed at anytime in class before they were given the poems. After the initial response, working together in groups refined their discussion about the poems by adding substantial details to the discussion and by including examples from the poems, making references from their religious background or personal experiences.

For the poetry responses discussing Blake's content a student wrote: "The poems are related to some part of the Bible... It is about God, evil, fear, liberty, happiness, time, poverty, and children." On a similar note another student from a different section wrote: "It is about bright and beautiful images, angels, God, fragility, Christ, and innocence; darkness, the bad side of the church, religion and hypocrisy."

Understanding the poem *The Lamb* a student used this verse from the Acts of the Apostles in King James Version of the Bible as reference for the poem. In it Jesus Christ is seen as a Lamb for Sacrifice and, as the student pointed out, it has similarity to the poem (See *The Lamb* lines 13-16). "Who made thee?/ He is mild,/ He became a little child/ He calls himself a lamb" The student also commented: "We are called by his name... We have been created by God and he is concerned with us..." The Bible says:

8:32 He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb without voice before his shearer, so openeth he not his mouth.

8:33 In humility his judgment was taken away. His generation who shall declare, for his life shall be taken from the earth?

Another student could have been referring to this very passage when writing: “Jesus like a lamb gave himself in sacrifice to rescue mankind and give us a place in heaven.” Some students made remarks concerning teachings from the Bible although not all could directly point out the sections as the previous student had done. A different student also wrote in a response: “The Lamb symbolizes innocence, God, Jesus, sacrifice, and a surrounding fundamental question to describe the nature of the universe... Also it invites a contrast between the perspective of innocence and experience.”

Students in the other section also said the lamb represents God. A student wrote: “*The Lamb* and *The Tyger* remind me of The Bible. It makes me think of the good or evil that we confront everyday... *The Lamb* is about the power of God, what he can do for us.” The student sees the divine image as a savior. Another student wrote in response to *The Lamb* “The Lord is my shepherd.” This verse from Mathew in the King James Version of the Bible concerns the student’s remark.

25:32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:

A student wrote in response to *The Lamb*: “This poem talks about Christian Faith,” and he quotes from the poem “For he calls himself a Lamb.” This verse from Revelations (KJV) describes God in a similar nature to the lamb.

1:14 His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire;

In a verse of Revelations from the King James Version of the Bible the subject of creation is discussed. Students pointed out that subject within their discussions of *The Lamb* and *The Tyger*. Taking under consideration the students’ Christian background, it is believed that they could have been referring to this verse.

1:8 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

In the poems *The Lamb* and *The Tyger*, God is capable of possessing different qualities, or as students said in small-group discussion, a personality. According to excerpts from the poems in a verse of Revelations (KJV) the subject of power over all things is discussed.

1:16 And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

1:18 I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

A student wrote that God is “a symbol of power, fearful and bright. To me this represents the two sides of God. He can make things weak and powerful depending on its purpose.” Another student in a different section wrote: “It is about creation, religion, Jesus, Christian faith. From the bad we learn, things go hand in hand with the good.”

A student from a different section wrote: “*The Lamb* represents innocence and the values of Jesus. It was gentleness, goodness and love. Values that God teaches us to be good humans.” A verse from Romans (KJV) refers to love and law otherwise known as the Ten Commandments.

13:10 Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

In response to *The Lamb* and *The Tyger* another student wrote: “During the reading I reaffirmed my religious belief in God.” The same student wrote, “God takes an important place in our life. He is the creator of the world.” The student quoted from the poem “Did He smile His work to see?/ Did He who made the lamb make thee?” The student explained “With this passage I know that God is happy with my deeds.” From the verse in Mathew (KJV) it is understood that one’s deeds are being looked upon.

25:40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Likewise the verse Luke (KJV) is about being a good Samaritan.

10:37 And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

One student wrote in response to *The Lamb* and *The Tyger* that “God is unique; he created two different kinds of animals with the same love.” This can be in reference to this passage from Revelations (KJV).

4:11 Thou art worth, Our Holy Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for thou hast created all things, and by thee they are, and by thy will they are and were created.

Another student wrote: “This author shows the importance that God has in our lives.” A student from a different section wrote: “It is related to God and that should be the most important thing in our lives.” These students believe that God is worthy of praise or worship. On a similar note a student wrote that the poems *The Lamb* and *The Tyger*: “suggests the biblical book of Genesis... compares the creation of different animals, the lamb of the Lord in Christian Faith is Jesus (his son).” “I believe God made all natural things and all different.” A verse in Psalm (KJV) is about God and creation.

100:3 Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

A student wrote in allusion to *The Lamb*: “The only thing that the child has clear was his innocent faith in Christianity.” *The Tyger* “was related with the spiritual and moral problems that have people many times.” A verse from Revelations (KJV) also discusses faith.

2:9 Be faithful even to death and I will give you a crown of life.

Two students believed that *The Tyger* referred to the devil because of its dread, one of them was specific enough to say that “in The Bible Satan is referred to as a star, and the poem talks about the star.” This may have been a transfer from their native language since Satan is commonly referred to in Spanish as Lucifer which is derived from the word “lucero,” a burning star. This idea was neither discarded nor promoted in other responses from the students that wrote them. In small-group sessions the other students neither discarded it nor promoted it.

In a different view a student discussed the image of God as a blacksmith in response to *The Tyger* and the Bible has a verse in Revelations that refers to that image. “Burnt the fire of thine eye?/ In what furnace was thine brain?” These lines may have been what gave the student the impression of such an image.

1:15 And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.

A student wrote in response to *Holy Thursday* and quoted from the poem: “Children go to a religious place and sing to God, innocent and miserable.” The student quotes from the poem “Babes reduced to misery.” He also writes “And so many children poor,” and quotes again “And their ways are filled with thorns, it is an eternal winter there.” Verses in Luke (KJV) refer to the situation that the student is describing about the poor and suffering.

6:20 And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God.

6:21 Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh.

6:22 Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake.

6:23 Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.

A student wrote in response to *Holy Thursday*: “It is a contrast of the rich and the poor... We have to do something about poverty because it will always exist and become worse.” Another student wrote: “The poem questions why children have to suffer. It

sounds like a cry for help; it is questioning why society doesn't do anything about it. It is a critique. To this day the problem is the same." Also in responding to *Holy Thursday*, a student wrote: "There was misery and begging, they look hopeless and it's described in "The sun never shines./ The fields are bleak and bare." Another student wrote in response to *Holy Thursday*; "The issue is charity, we have to do it more than once a year. We have some financial aid such as "cupones." The poem is a critique. I think the author wants to evoke a cry for help to God to have mercy on them." A verse from Colossians (KJV) refers to the students' concept of charity.

3:14 And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

A student wrote in response to *Holy Thursday*: "The author gives us an opportunity to reflect about this social problem (poverty, misery). A problem that existed for many years and only a few deal with it" This verse from 1 Corinthians (KJV) discusses the students idea about charity.

13:3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

13:4 Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

13:5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

In responding to *Holy Thursday* a student wrote on a similar note to the previous ones: “These poems teach us that no matter if we live in misery or in a good situation we should always thank God for what we have.” The student could have been referring to this teaching from Revelations (KJV) about suffering, and unshakable Christian faith.

2:7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

A student in response to *Holy Thursday* wrote: “Children are angels of God” This verse from Mark (KJV) has a connotation that is similar to the students’ remark.

10:14 But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.

In response to *Nurses Song* a student wrote: “The children’s innocent and simple joy; presents the children are part of nature... The nurse like an angel protects the children and enjoys their play.” These verses from Mathew (KJV) allude to what the student responds for the poem.

18:4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

18:10 Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.

Another student wrote in response to *Nurses Song* and quoted: “Your spring and your day are wasted in play/ And your winter and night in disguise.” The student wrote that the poem: “Shows deception about the world.” The student explained that as children we see the world very differently from what we do as adults. Innocence does not let us see what may be wrong. Our world has rules or responsibilities and that freedom is what the nurse may miss.

The written responses demonstrated that the students were able to understand the poems by themselves. The students underwent a process of questioning themselves and they have used the examples that fit their own life experiences and religious background which is influenced by an upbringing in the Christian Faith.

### **Findings of Poetry Written Responses**

In order to organize the responses the students turned in, questions for evaluation were designed. The questions helped determine how students found understanding in the text, if the reading guide influenced their responses and how the responses helped them find understanding of Blake. The questions also helped determine how accurate students were in their understanding.

Table 1: What is the student bringing to understanding the poem?

Note: PE = Personal Experience, RM = Religious Movies, OP = Other Poems.

Title	Type of Response	Number Responses
The Lamb	Religion = 6 Text = 1 PE = 1 Bible = 2	10
The Tyger	Religion = 6 Text = 2 Bible = 2	10

Lamb & Tyger	Religion = 4 RM = 1 Bible = 2 Text = 1	8
Holy Thursday from Innocence	Religion = 3 Text = 7 PE = 1	11
Holy Thursday from Experience	Text = 11 Bible = 1	12
Nurses Song from Innocence	Text = 8 OP = 1 PE = 1	10
Nurses Song from Experience	OP = 1 Text = 9 PE = 1	11
Reflective	Bible = 2 Religion = 4 Text = 4 Social = 1	11
Blake Archive	Visual = 8	8

It can be noted that the students are responding according to their own experiences, whether in religious terms, personal life experiences or from prior reading skills. Another thing to keep in mind is that not using a personal experience in the response does not mean that the student did not experience the text. As indicated in a previous section, the students used parts of the poem in order to present their views and this shows an engagement with the text. The students responded according to their experience of that reading. The students' responses proved that their understanding was found within experiences rather than in the text itself. There are higher numbers for religion, the Bible and personal experience than the numbers for the text.

Table 2: Do we see the influence of the reader's guide in the answer?

Note: By (loosely) it is meant that the students used comparison and contrast of the poems thus indirectly providing answers for the questions without having written them down.

Title	Type of Response	Number Responses
The Lamb	No = 7 Yes = 3	10
The Tyger	No = 6 Yes = 2 loosely Yes = 2	10
Lamb & Tyger	No = 4 Yes = 3 Yes = 1 loosely	8
Holy Thursday from Innocence	No = 7 Yes = 2 Yes = 2 loosely	11
Holy Thursday from Experience	No = 6 Yes = 1 Yes = 5 loosely	12
Nurses Song from Innocence	No = 6 Yes = 4	10
Nurses Song from Experience	No = 7 Yes = 2 Yes = 2 loosely	11
Reflective	No = 11	11
Blake Archive	No = 7 Yes = 1 loosely	8

Among the things to consider is that those students that did use the reading guide answered the questions; however, these responses were not necessarily directed to describing their experiences. Their answers were rather limited. From the table for question 2 it can be noted that the students did not place high priority on using the reading guide since the numbers for “no” are much higher than the numbers for “yes.” There is also a lack of consistency in the number of student responses because, for unknown reasons, some students did not turn in some responses for some of the poems.

Table 3: Does the response show a growth in understanding of Blake?

Title	Type of Response	Number Responses
The Lamb	No = 9 Yes = 1	10
The Tyger	No = 9 Yes = 1	10
Lamb & Tyger	No = 5 Yes = 3	8

Holy Thursday from Innocence	No = 7 Yes = 4	11
Holy Thursday from Experience	No = 9 Yes = 3	12
Nurses Song from Innocence	No = 10	10
Nurses Song from Experience	No = 10 Yes = 1	11
Reflective	No = 4 Yes = 7	11
Blake Archive	No = 6 Yes = 2	8

In this question concerned with understanding of Blake or the Romantics, neither the reading guide nor reader-response aided in understanding, but in terms of the poems there is greater understanding from the initial response to the last. Responses depend on the individual and his personal reading experiences. In the first reading, for example, no one made inferences about Blake but by the third they started seeing Blake as a critic rather than a poet although these were few compared to the total.

Table 4: Is this response accurate and substantiated?

Note: AC = Accurate, NAC = Not Accurate, S = Substantiated, NS = Not Substantiated.

Title	Type of Response	Number Responses
The Lamb	ACNS = 4 ACS = 6	10
The Tyger	ACNS = 6 ACS = 4	10
Lamb & Tyger	ACNS = 7 ACS = 1	8
Holy Thursday from Innocence	ACNS = 6 ACS = 4 NACNS = 1	11
Holy Thursday from Experience	ACNS = 7 ACS = 5	12
Nurses Song from Innocence	ACNS = 6 ACS = 4	10
Nurses Song from Experience	ACNS = 7 ACS = 4	11
Reflective	ACNS = 5	11

	NACNS = 1 ACS = 5	
Blake Archive	ACNS = 2 ACS = 6	8

In this question “accurate” refers to what was expected within discussion of the poems. And “not substantiated” means that students did not use quotes or direct examples of personal experience to provide clear understanding of their point of view. However, some of the students did use summary within their responses. From what was gathered it was noted that the students’ responses are accurate although some may have failed to provide examples for their ideas.

As noted earlier students in both sections have demonstrated that they can work independently with poetry. Students demonstrated that they can not only comment on their views of the poems during class with their peers but they also show that they can demonstrate understanding within their written responses as well. After obtaining the students’ responses such data collection was considered qualitative data: it cannot be counted but it can be reviewed for noticeable patterns and insights into students’ responses. Benefits of using reader-response theory with an ESL audience in the basic track at the university level are apparent.

This chapter’s description of the materials, subjects, setting and tables critically reflect on reader-response and Freirian pedagogy for teaching Blake’s poetry. Observations from theory and practice provide answers to the research questions, showing that educators need to vary their teaching to ESL students for them to succeed in independent learning and critical thinking during their understanding of the poems. The limitations, suggestions for future research, pedagogical implications and pedagogical contributions are also provided in the last chapter.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Conclusions and Pedagogical Considerations for Teaching of Blake**

The main goal of this thesis was for English 3202 (English Composition and Reading) students to produce meaningful responses to six poems by William Blake by using reader-response theory and Freirian pedagogy. Student responses were considered meaningful if the student was able to question the text, identify a purpose, predict possibilities and check them, connect his or her background knowledge to the interpretation of the poem, summarize the situation presented, and connect one text to another or identify relationships.

This chapter addresses the research questions presented in chapter 1 and discusses reader-response and Freirian pedagogy for teaching Blake. The data collected from the anecdotal observations during the small-group discussions and from the students' written responses provided aid in pointing out the benefits of the approach, which vary from engagement in reading and writing to small-group discussions. The sources used in chapter 2 for this study were also helpful in establishing the validity of what was observed. Limitations of the study, suggestions for future research, practical solutions to the problem of obtaining meaningful responses and contributions of the study are also presented.

#### **Research Questions**

1. How necessary is it for ESL students in English to have background information within reader- response to interpret a poem?

Background information is necessary within reader-response for ESL students in English to interpret a poem due to their need to activate the schema necessary for understanding the poems. Students' understanding was dependent on their background information and experiences. Students looked into social contexts from a different period that was not entirely similar to theirs. If looking into poetry, it has to be something that they will relate to; and in order to relate to something they will need the background information. In *The Lamb*, *The Tyger* and *Holy Thursday* students found understanding because they had a religious background that allowed them to relate to ideas presented in the poems. For example, students that had discussed charity made connections to present management of earnings in the Church. Students also made connections to the commercials from Christian Funds.

2. Can Blake be taught with minimal instruction from the teacher as Freirian Pedagogy implies?

Another observation noted was that Blake can be taught with minimal instruction from the teacher as Freire suggested. Students can discuss poetry independently within a small-group. The teacher stops being the focus and instead becomes a facilitator. The students can also apply critical thinking skills in using reader-response with minimal instruction. Freirian pedagogy is also helpful within generative themes since the topic of discussion is something that they should be familiar with in their own social context; from there the students can move on to other related topics of discussion that are important or relevant to the material being discussed. For example, when students discussed the poem *Nurses' Song* they found understanding because it discussed childhood phases they had already lived through. Some of the students discussed issues in

parenting because they were parents, uncles, older brothers/sisters or working in an environment where they had to provide childcare. The students talked about the process of decision making, who was involved in that process, “how do you know when to let go” and how to determine when you have made the right decision.

3. Rosenblatt considered the use of tools for activating schema in order to elicit response. Does using visual aids such as Blake’s plates help students understand the poems? What difference does it make to see the different plates of the poems?

It is worth noting that based on the students’ responses visual aids served as a tool for activating schema which served to elicit students’ responses. The students believed that the plates helped their understanding. In terms of difference in understanding students noted plenty of details that aided their argument, although, if the plates would have been used prior to reading they may have focused entirely on what they observed instead of what they could gather from the poems. The students did a good job in understanding the poems, and seeing the plates allowed them to make further contributions during class discussion. When the pictures were shown students noted the use of nature, a detail commonly used during the Romantic period which Blake had chosen to incorporate in pictorial form.

4. Do multiple readings of a poem within reader-response provide different effects in students’ perceptions or understanding of the poem from their first response to the last?

In using reader-response multiple readings of the poems showed that the more the students read the more they got into the poetry. Students were likely to find something they had overlooked on a previous reading or relate to as they gained more experience in reading during the six days. However, it did not provide a different effect in students’

perceptions or understanding as the students did not deviate from their original observations; instead they provided more details as evidence or examples for their ideas.

5. Both Rosenblatt and Freire had discussed the idea of students being able to relate to the material once they have made a connection to their own experiences. At what point do students relate to the poems, if that happened at all?

Students showed they could relate to the poems in the small-group discussion where they compared what was being described in the poems to things they had read, and seen, such as commercials, events in history, or personal experiences. The ideas of Rosenblatt and Freire showed that students are able to relate to the work they have read once they are able to establish a connection to their own life experiences.

6. Freire discussed the necessity of creating consciousness in the students of the social experiences that they encounter. Looking at students' responses, what are the students more conscious of at the end of the lessons that they were not conscious of before?

The students demonstrated that they were conscious of the issues presented in the poems and by the last response they saw Blake as a critic. They were aware that the issues discussed are still relevant to them. They became conscious of a social problem and were able to learn about religious allusions as they progressed. The study showed that students' consciousness of the social issues they encountered was created as students read Blake's poems.

### **Benefits of Reader-Response Theory and Freirian Pedagogy**

In using reader-response and Freirian pedagogy as the means to approach William Blake's poetry, students expanded their ideas by writing responses and improved their poetry reading skills. Students engaged in reading and writing to produce a meaningful

response. Students also allocated time to reading and writing development as they found necessary.

As shown in chapter 3, the student responses were analyzed to determine the extent to which reader-response and Freirian pedagogy assisted in developing responses that argue about the content and the context of the poems. The results reveal that reader-response and Freirian pedagogy are an appropriate approach to teaching William Blake's poetry as seen by the amount of reading and writing that students engaged in during the process. Journals were a valid method to get students to engage in reading and writing as it is necessary for them to invest time in order to produce meaningful responses.

This study demonstrated the benefits of using reader-response to poetry with an ESL audience. In using reader-response theory students developed a habit of approaching poetry by using an initial process of questioning. The students asked themselves questions about specific parts or aspects of the poems, which they were not in the habit of doing before they came into the classroom. Students often had a crisis of meaning but learned how to manage the poem by dividing it into parts or what they felt were important bits of the poem. This allowed them to approach the poems by finding a so called point of attack, which is the most fundamental problem-solving skill within poetry, something that can later on also aid learners in understanding other literary genres. Students applied the skill of questioning and posed important questions that they could apply to reading other poems or literary texts. These questions were not only their personal questions about the poems but were also questions raised by working in groups with classmates, who more often than not, had similar concerns. In realizing that others shared their understandings or confusions, they became reassured and less anxious about

working with a poem. If students' minds were free from worry, they concentrated on the poems and the process was less arduous and created less fatigue (see Kohl's adaptation fatigue in Ernst-Slavit et al. 2002).

Another benefit of using reader-response and Freirian pedagogy in poetry within the teaching agenda is that it allows the teacher to step back and interfere only when needed and as minimally as possible. The students take control of their own learning and develop responsibility. We notice that there is less memorization and more critical thinking. Although as educators we feel the need to say certain things, it is best to help students learn how to learn on their own rather than giving it all to them. Discussion of poems through reader-response and Freirian pedagogy allows the instructors and the students to learn what the important questions and issues are. Upon learning what those areas of concern or further development are, subsequent agendas can be directed for students to focus on those things. Reader-response, Freirian pedagogy and journals as a method for students to gather their ideas allow for the students to try out or dare to point out ideas that they would ordinarily hesitate to express in a regular classroom discussion. Students feel less at risk when offering interpretations of the poems because they learn that everything is a process of questioning and all answers are provisional or possible. If this is explained, it becomes especially useful in reducing fear of voicing their ideas. Students can realize that with time, culture, and other variables like changes in language (e.g. meaning of words over time) or even changes within the reader himself or herself as he/she acquires more experience, not only about life but also about reading, changes how we view a poem. Reader-response, Freirian pedagogy and journal entries develop

students' reading skills. As the teacher read their journals or paid attention in their group conversations, students were quite involved in processes such as evaluation and analysis.

Another way in which reader-response theory proved to be valuable was that after such student involvement with the poems the educators' role becomes restricted and students become the center. Within the precepts of reader-response and Freirian pedagogy, this is not only good but it is precisely what reinforces the association between learning and responding to poetry or any other genre. In large classes, using reader-response, Freirian pedagogy, journals and small-group discussions allows for all to make brief contributions without interventions and students in turn become self-reflective about the study of poetry.

In relation to Blake's poetry, it was noted in small-group discussions that the poet's use of a nursery rhyme as a pattern while providing a varied set of meters, rhythms and rhyme schemes helped students avoid struggling towards meaning. These things did not become an issue because their familiarity with the style gave them a certain level of comfort. Although poetry is traditionally formal in the sense that many focus on its form, another important factor is the visual qualities that are attached to Blake's poems. Connecting the visual with textual add up to the process of organizing or disorganizing ideas of the minds' eye (e.g. schema). Schema is a fundamental part of linking memory to what is in the text. It also becomes useful in helping students notice differences or similarities in form and style.

While it is good to spend a good deal of time in interaction and self-reflective poetry reading, both should be integrated together for optimal results. In other words, the more students knew about a piece the better to guide the context and focus towards a skill

that developed perceptive, active, thoughtful readers of poetry. Needless to say some things worked better with certain classes or students than others. Teaching goes hand in hand with personality and we need to adapt these methods to our own practices and students' needs. As students learn about the meaning of poetry we must provide the benefits of our own knowledge and skills. The most rewarding point of study was that students found connections between historical and contemporary ideas and issues on their own. It was also surprising to find how much students know about a wide variety of subjects when they pull their knowledge together. Students were able to analyze and respond to texts without the help of lectures. It is through such lessons that students learn that patience, close examination, and reflection forms the poem itself.

In relation to engaging in reading and writing, as originally predicted, responses varied greatly according to the groups in the actual study in the second semester of 2004 - 2005 and the previous semester for the pilot study. Reading in the small groups was not a silent process. A lot more time was devoted to discussion of assignments, interpretations and vocabulary on the poems amongst themselves than actual reading of the poems. Students talked about the poems and some got quite passionate about defending their views. In comparison to the pilot study, student responses showed organization in content and context of ideas gathered from Blake's poetry. Having guidelines motivated weaker readers and writers to build discussion in their responses.

The use of small-group discussions revealed improved attention to the text and a desire to arrive at meaning through a process of exploration. Students reviewed tentative ideas in collaboration. Discussions also showed a gradual development of autonomous behavior among the students involved: they showed confidence in their responses; there

was tolerance for ambiguity; they negotiated meaning; they showed their individual reading strategies, and there was willingness to change minds.

As Ernst-Slavit et al. reported and observations gathered from the teaching experience showed, the more balanced the ESL development, the more ESL students are able to achieve. Educational programs need to include what students bring with them, things they can relate to. Focus should be placed on what students have rather than what they lack. Teaching and learning is enhanced when participants are able to apply their own experiences with the generalizations and conceptualizations offered to them. What helps students construct meaning is being able to connect what they know with what the new environment offers.

It was noted that Blake's and Freire's purpose was to create socially conscious people who could think critically about the problems they face and the problems society has faced throughout the generations. As Ernst-Slavit, et al. suggest, similar to Freire, everyone has a right to an education. Everyone deserves the chance to succeed and it is in being critically conscious that they will become collaborative members of the society. Similarly Blake demonstrated concern about living situations in order to make people reflect upon their social situations. Freire's views about the arts and poets show a similar vision to Blake's.

It was perceived that students had a problem with poetry and my aim was to fix it in order to help them relate to and understand it. The poems were selected because they discussed the issues that students were overheard criticizing with respect to their own experiences within the social context since social issues affect us all.

People today have lost sight of the power that has been given to them. They have freedom of speech but do not use it for the betterment of mankind and instead misuse it. People today know they have laws to protect them but use them to carry-out their own will rather than trying to use such freedom to help the world.

Blake and Freire wanted people to wake-up, to speak, to change their views and themselves, to be free but help mankind, not just themselves, to realize that they can do something with their voice. Blake and Freire believed and showed through their work that life holds meaning upon expression.

As educators and citizens who should treat others with respect, we should never underestimate students' ability to do something but rather challenge and help them see that they can do many things. Professors should not impose knowledge; their knowledge is not infinite and students are not ignorant. Believing so is conventional and it inhibits progress. Students should be shown how to adapt to the changing world and not to conform to it. Freire, Rosenblatt and even Blake wanted to liberate the creative powers of their society and we should all aim to do the same if we want to change the world and make it a better place.

Written responses to *Holy Thursday*, *The Lamb* and *The Tyger* revealed religious background whereas the responses to *Nurses Song* revealed personal experiences from childhood. As students noted and quoted, as a child time was wasted in play. As an adult other responsibilities take over their lives. Reader-response theory is important for the student because it shows that students have made connections from their own experience to understand the poems and showed they could be responsible for their own learning. This is what Freire believed students should be taught to do. Students used a reader-

centered approach to literature. The literature used was relevant to their lives, and what appears to be an important element of it. The center of the educational learning experience was the student. The student was the most important part, not the text or the author and not the instructor. The readers were the creators of meaning in their transaction with the text. Using reader-response theory in small-group discussions among the students made the teaching and learning of literature a live process. The power in the classroom was no longer mine but theirs. This leads us as educators to consider the kind of texts that we use, as well as to rethink what we do when we teach, why and for whom that literature is being taught. The change to a student-centered approach was for the better in terms of class discussion. Other types of interpretation with reader-response were not observed because of the influence of Christian background in the lives of the students.

Through reader-response theory, from a teacher's point of view, insight was gained into questioning students' ability to interpret poetry. In terms of writing, however, one questions whether students' positions are defensible. As a reader myself more is expected in the process of exploration, but then again my level of competency and skill is not the same as theirs. That is why Freirian pedagogy was so important. It exhorts that teachers should teach their students the skills they would need to be responsible for their learning. Blake made his readers think, question, and look further.

Knowledge of the text was important but personal knowledge was given importance over it. Using reader-response gives teachers the ability to get students involved because it has a personal importance to them rather than spending time seeking other information. As Appleman (2000) states, the responses vary from student to student

according to their own personal experiences. However, in our case it is noticeable that students have reached an agreement within what is considered acceptable in understanding the poem because they are a rather homogenous group. Using reader-response for the teaching of literature allows us to see that using one's personal experiences in order to connect to the text can be a fruitful way to make meaning. When teachers use this approach, they do so because they want their students to read literature in order to gain insight into their own lives and to gain perspective on their own situations. When students are able to gain such insight, they give value to the reading. It is known now that personal connection and engagement with literature is gained when students measure the relationship of *The Lamb*, *The Tyger*, *Nurses Song* and *Holy Thursday* through their own experiences with religion and growing up.

Although some may consider it suspicious to find educational attainment in expressing personal response as a satisfactory outcome of learning, in our teaching environment it is more than justifiable to get the kind of response in which students see a religious relationship tied to the poems. My students found it motivating enough to avoid plagiarizing or using outside sources. They internalized the text and engaged with it. Our view of reader-response is limited when we look at the differences that exist between the students' world and the world of the text. What may be questioned here is how literature promotes knowledge of others. Life is about experiences and we may live through similar situations. Some experiences are universal, (love, faith, sadness). Literature is based on those experiences. Otherwise no one would be able to engage with any text.

## **Limitations**

One limitation to the study is that none of the lessons were recorded and this type of record can be used to keep track of what was said and done rather than having to rely on anecdotal records. Recording can capture detailed and specific observations of what was accomplished in the classroom and what was heard.

Another limitation was the homogeneity of the group in terms of ethnicity and religion. For such reason one cannot truly be certain if the results would have varied in a less homogenous group.

Irregularity in student attendance also created difficulty. This irregularity created inconsistencies in the amount of student responses gathered. It also made the amount of students working in small-group discussions fluctuate.

## **Suggestions for Future Research**

Trying out the material used in this study with groups that differ from this one in ethnicity and religion would also be interesting. To use the material with heterogeneous groups would also be interesting.

For future research a questionnaire on students' experiences can be developed to use before the teaching of poetry in order to help the teacher determine what knowledge the students bring. A background questionnaire prior to reading or application of the method would help determine students' schemata. For example as students pointed out that "He" in capital letters is used to identify a reference to God. This can be considered as transference from their own native language because this had not been taught in English classes. For *Holy Thursday* students did not use the poem or religion as focus; they used the reading guide and Christian teaching does not seem to be informing the

students while reading this particular poem. The theme they focused on was poverty. Those who did not use religious reference and used the text applied a new critical approach that they might have been taught prior to the course.

Testing reader-response ability to enable students to get a sense of poetry with pre and post tests would be ideal to measure how the students' understanding has or has not improved throughout the reading process.

Using different subjects other than the teacher's own students in a team-teaching scenario would also be advisable because this way the teacher can gather more information and observe if other students work differently.

Another possibility is to determine the reasons for the success in this study. Was it successful because the Romantic period was appealing to the students or was it an example of the benefits of narrow reading as defined by Krashen?

### **Pedagogical Implications**

Practical solutions to the problem being studied need to be mentioned because through mistakes one can learn how to improve teaching and research methods. The results show that increasing the amount of time students spend on reading poems and writing responses improves not only their poetry reading skills but also the quality of their written responses. Although all students benefit from this, it is the weaker students that get the most out of it. A useful solution to help weaker students would be to increase time of reading and writing according to students' progress and needs. In this case for example, there were three sessions in the pilot study, which was increased to six in the actual study.

In the pilot study and in the actual study students had not received particular instruction on what they were expected to do. Educators can talk to students about their reading and build their confidence as readers, as well as help them understand the benefits of working on their own.

Using this approach there is less structure than is conventional and it worked well for small-group discussion, but the results with writing were more complicated. The discovery made was that reader-response implies there are no guidelines because students decide what will be done with the poems. The subjects had never been given that freedom. They could understand the concept when it came to discussions but when it came to writing that was another story. They thought reading was bad enough and writing was seen as punishment. The implication here is that more work needs to be done in order to increase the quality of written responses, which would take more time than the six lessons used for this study.

Like Appleman (2000), it was never explained to the students that what we were doing was reader-response. Students were not exactly sure what they were supposed to do when they responded to a text. They just knew they had to respond personally. Students had been so used to writing about what their professors assigned that when students were given the freedom to write about their own opinion, they were not sure how to do so and had difficulty writing. This can be another possible research venture.

When taking into account the use of additional resources with some poems, it may be a good idea to use introductory exercises to create a mental schema appropriate to the poem. This relates to the general belief behind activating schemata in the sense that this reminds students and requires the teacher to be a mediator during reading.

In using reader-response theory and Freirian pedagogy for teaching ESL students the poetry of Blake it was noted that there is sparse documentation on the subjects of eighteenth century and Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience* within teaching ESL literature and composition. No theory has within itself a clear set of instructions for how one might teach in a classroom, which should be modified. During classroom discourse it was observed that the techniques are limited to asking questions, awaiting feedback, asking for evidence to support those ideas and starting again with another set of questions, all of which are combined to brief examples found in the text. A reader centered reading encourages students to incorporate their own experiences with texts, thus allowing their individual differences to become part of discussion. In focusing only on understanding, educators underestimate the role of subjective experiences in shaping meaning. As Beach (1993) points out reader-response theories have not had much influence on practice and cannot seem to find a consensus between defining the reader or his tasks nor account for the variations in social or cultural contexts that shape meaning. Another factor which is underestimated, as Corcoran cited in (Rosenblatt 1991), is that little attention is given to how gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status influence response. As a different ethnic group, the students had evident Hispanic Christian values or distinctions adding knowledge of how this works with a particular ethnic group.

Similarly on the difficulties of the approach Armstrong (1990) proves to be correct in the sense that trying to explain coherently, the ambiguity of the responses without self-contradiction is neither safe nor easy. Dias (1996) had suggested, using

journals only captures the gist of students' understanding and discussion falls short of representing the complete discussion.

The basic essence of research or teaching is as Pradl cited in (Rosenblatt 1991) suggested, one should always challenge presumptions and prejudices in order to avoid becoming complacent towards diversity, because we do not know all there is to know of the world in its entirety. One should aim to be self-critical and self-conscious. According to Rosenblatt, the importance of literature is that it is a means of "exploring" and celebrating human experience. The purpose that reader-response and Freirian pedagogy serve is that they are both tools for students and teachers to explore and find knowledge.

In agreement with Dias, one can say that when preparing for readings a useful assignment in small-groups is to ask students to prepare performances of particular poems. This may involve one or several readers, dramatization, the use of props, and musical accompaniment where appropriate. In the presentation students will face decisions such as tone, inflection, pace, gestures, stance, and ways of highlighting ambiguities within the text. As they observe other groups they realize the possibilities of meaning. In reader-response these have been suggested methods to getting the students involved with poetry. These can help in allowing students to learn about the stylistics used in poetry undergoing a discussion of all the areas within poetry.

Dias and others claimed that writing is another way of getting students to learn how to think and express themselves. It is often said that students must see themselves as authors to become better readers. Keeping a journal is also helpful in allowing students to notice how their responses have altered.

Scholars like Dias and Rosenblatt had stated that teachers should encourage students to reread poems so that they become increasingly aware of the various ways in which poems appeal to meaning and also to sound if read aloud. Post small-group teacher discussion should be a contribution to open possibilities of new meaning.

Choosing poems is another key factor in helping students become more responsible and responsive. Although Dias had noted that non-contemporary works tend to create a dependency on teachers to explain terms or references, students can realize that their own experiences are relevant to those presented in the poems. Based on personal observations students seem able to tackle poetry of another period. Students only need more time or several readings. The poems' content was relevant to the students' immediate life issues. Students did not read any other poetry in class other than that used for this study. The study, however, proved correct when considering the student audience used for the pilot, which had not been as responsive to other poetry when given poetry from other periods.

Educators should follow Armstrong's advice in combining historical and epistemological questioning. Studying past practices can assist in resolving contemporary questions about understanding thus allowing us to assess the implications of our choices. We must also take into account Beach's recommendations to determine how actual readers may respond before actual classroom practices are applied. Teachers should determine from students' responses where they show failure to expand beyond stock responses and foster students' expression of responses. As Eco (1990) suggests one should categorize students' responses. A way to categorize responses would be what Armstrong calls: "distinguish between weak and strong disagreements" among the

students. This way the teacher can help the students understand and guide discussion according to expected student needs and outcomes.

A piece of literature from the past can best be understood by using background knowledge since the dimensions involved in that period are not the same as students may encounter in their time although the issues may be similar to varying degrees.

### **Pedagogical Contribution**

The contribution this study offers for classroom practice is relevant to previous discoveries made within the subject. As Dias (1996) had pointed out, a classroom that places an investment on eliciting information or getting the facts encourages a bottom-up reading, which takes little account of the reader's contributions to the making of meaning or the notion of reading as a transaction between reader and text. It creates dependency on the educators rather than promoting critical reading and writing skills.

Any approach to the teaching of poetry should take account of differences in reading patterns and should help students develop confidence in their own resources as readers of poetry. Small-group discussions are helpful because they allow for other skills such as reading and pre-writing to be developed. As well, it allows for sharing of interpretations and speaking.

It also seems evident that undirected small-group discussion assigns responsibility for making sense of the poem to the reader. Readers are made aware of the several possibilities of meaning and are more likely to learn to live with ambiguity and to postpone closure. Readers also learn to tolerate and consider other ways of reading and, in the process, reevaluate their own ways of reading. Therefore as the group considers its

observations and evaluations, readers may develop some degree of confidence in their own responses.

Rosenblatt (1978) suggested that it is more likely that readers will call to mind a personal experience of the poem within the relative security of the small-group than within the large-group. Readers are also more likely to announce the feelings and associations called up by the poem, which are a vital part of "the lived-through experience of the work."

Overall this study indicated that the cultural background and personal experiences of the students, the focus of reader-response theory, had a positive influence on students' understanding of the poems. Similarly, with Freirian Pedagogy students found the poems to be of critical importance to life issues and Christian faith, and therefore they invested time in taking responsibility for their own learning.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Definition of Important Terms

*Action Research* - Kemmis and McTaggart (1982: 5) define it "as trying out ideas in practice as a means of improvement and of increasing knowledge about the curriculum, teaching, and learning."

*Aesthetic Reading* - Allen cited in (Rosenblatt 1991) who describes it as an absorption of the experience between thought and feeling that occurs during the reading itself.

*Affective Fallacy* – The Affective Fallacy is a feature of New Criticism, and close reading. According to Iser it is confusion between the poem and its results (what it is and what it does). Affective Fallacy begins by trying to derive the standards of criticism from the psychological effects of the poem and ends in impressionism and relativism. Affective Fallacy cannot be applied to a theory of aesthetic response, because such a theory is concerned with the structure of the 'performance', which precedes the effect. The theory of aesthetic response has an analytical separation of performance and results as a basic premise, and this premise is simply not taken into account with readers or critics as "What does the text mean?" (Iser 26-27).

*Coding* - of an existential situation is the representation of that situation, showing some of its constituent elements in interaction. (Freire 96b)

*Conscientization* - "refers to the process in which men, not as recipients, but as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness both of the socio-cultural reality which shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality (Freire 27a)."

*Contradiction* - denotes the dialectical conflict between opposing social forces.

*Decoding* - is the critical analysis of the coded situation. (Freire 96b)

*Efferent Reading* – As identified by Allen takes place as the reader reads through the text only seeking specific bits of information at its conclusion, for example when looking at instructions or warnings.

*Gestalt* - The Heritage Dictionary defines it as a physical, biological, psychological, or symbolic configuration or pattern of elements so unified as a whole that its properties cannot be derived from a simple summation of its parts. On the other hand (Iser 119) calls it "consistent interpretation."

*Hermeneutic* - Leitch (2001) describes it as the theory of interpretation; a model, which holds that meaning is not straightforward but continually modified by feedback.

*Interaction* - Salvatori cited in (Rosenblatt 1991) suggests interaction refers to the method of involvement or development with the text, the teacher or the author's authority.

*Relationship* - Salvatori indicates that although referred to in terms between the text and student it is used as a synonym for transaction.

*Schema Theory* – As defined by Grow (1996) a schema (plural schemata) is a hypothetical mental structure for representing concepts stored in memory. It is a framework, thought to have features of generic or abstract knowledge; used to guide encoding, organization, and retrieval of information. It reflects experiences encountered by an individual and can be shared within a culture. Schema may be formed and used without the individual's conscious awareness. Once formed, schemata are thought to be relatively stable over time.

*Symmetry* – As identified by Iser refers to balance, order, and completeness.

*Transaction* - Salvatori states that transaction is used in texts as the interrelationship between the knower and what is known. It is the process by which the reader transforms what is in the text into something meaningful.

*Transcendence* – According to Freire transcendence signifies the capacity of human consciousness to surpass the limitations of the objective configuration. Without such "transcendental intentionality" this consciousness of what exists beyond limitations would be impossible.

## Appendix B: Reading Guide

### *Introduction:*

This lesson is part of the reader-response theory and Freirian pedagogy in the William Blake sequence for English 3202 (English Composition and Reading). Students were given minimal instruction on how to work with the poems in order to have students familiarize themselves with an initial piece before they moved on to other pieces and other skills such as juxtaposition, poetry pairs and visual artistry. The materials and activities presented here were effective teaching tools for allowing students to actively participate in searching for meaning and building knowledge in the process of interpreting the poems and providing responses. Students analyze these poems by reading, predicting, and sharing how these works can be antithetical. Students worked in groups to give details of how two antithetical Blake poems may be juxtaposed for greater understanding. Instructions, are included (See appendix C). The lesson also engaged the students to apply their perspectives concerning the areas of textual, experiential and social responses. The lessons are a step in understanding Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience* for the ESL classroom while using a reader-response theory and Freirian pedagogy. The lessons also involve examination of the art, which Blake intended to accompany the poetry. Students were exposed to the use of images to complement writing. Students also produced their own writing or art work, which served as an activity to build on the next, which is Blake's art. In the last sessions students were exposed to the images in Blake's art through the Blake Archive.

**Day 1: Becoming Familiar with Blake's Poem***Primary Learning Outcome:*

Students are expected to become familiar with William Blake's *The Lamb* and to develop expectations for the sequence of lessons that involve poetry.

*Additional Learning Outcome:*

Students will have an understanding of what working with poetry and writing responses to poetry involves.

*Area of Focus:*

This class allows students to feel comfortable with reading poetry so that they do not feel intimidated by its difficulties or complexities and permits them to respond to poetry without feeling overwhelmed by having to memorize all the elements of poetry. As a result students should learn how to read critically and respond to poetry rather than viewing it as an imposed system of critical interpretations for understanding.

*Procedures:*

Duration: 50 minutes

1. Ask students to write down the words they do not understand from the poem while they read and guess the meaning of the word from context, then to look in the dictionary if still necessary.
2. Introduce the work of discussion for the day, *The Lamb*.
3. Read the poem aloud.
4. Ask students to read the poem again and write down their initial response.

5. Provide students with a set of guidelines for journal entries and discussions. Read and explain those guidelines if students demonstrate the need for further explanations.
6. Assign students into small-groups of 4.
7. Allow time for initial responses to be discussed in small-groups.
8. Students will share their responses with the class by carrying out a group task.
9. Group task: Describe the events to identify a clear picture of what is going on in the poem. Organize an outline of sequence of events and place them in chronological order. Point out themes or main ideas. Identify other elements that the group may have noticed. Be strict with timing take no more than 15 minutes on this step.
10. Each group presents the results of the task and all versions are compared. The teacher should interact with the students in this stage.
11. The teacher should assign the next reading, *The Tyger*, and will remind students to write a new journal entry reflecting on new insights of the poem. As well as an entry for their initial perceptions on the assigned poem for the next class.

*Attachments for the lesson:*

Title: Procedures for Journal Entries for Students and Procedure for Classroom Discussions for Students (See Appendix C).

Description: These documents may be photocopied as general instructions for the journal entries and group discussions.

*Assessment:*

The teacher will collect students' journal entries.

*Remediation:*

There would be no need for remediation with the activity.

**Day 2: Blake's *The Lamb* and *The Tyger****Primary Learning Outcomes:*

Students will be able to answer the following:

How does the theme or message of *The Lamb* compare to that of *The Tyger*?

How might these works be juxtaposed for greater understanding?

*Additional Learning Outcomes:*

Students will be able to answer the following question:

How does your own view of a possible creator reconcile with that of Blake's?

*Area of Focus:*

Students will read critically, ask pertinent questions, recognize assumptions and implications, and evaluate and analyze ideas. As they do so they become familiar with the structural elements of literature (e.g., plot, characterization, mood, tone, and point of view) while they write and speak critically about literature. This also allows them to understand major cultural, religious, philosophical, and political influences of a given period or culture. Students will identify, comprehend, and summarize the main ideas in the poems. They will learn that words gather meaning from the implied context while they create hypotheses and predict outcomes. They will conceive and develop ideas about topics for the purpose of speaking to a group, choose and organize related ideas, present them clearly, and evaluate similar views by others to present an argument in an orderly and convincing way.

*Materials and Equipment:*

Handouts of guide questions given in previous class.

*Guide Questions:*

1. Of what other works of literature do these two works remind you of?
2. What things do the works make you think of?
3. List the ways in which the works are similar.
4. List the differences between the works.
5. Do these two works seem designed to complement one another? If, not why? If so, how do you know?
6. Would the experience of reading *The Tyger* before *The Lamb* be different than the experience of reading *The Lamb* before *The Tyger*? Why or why not?

*Procedures/Activities:*

Step: 1 Duration: approx. 50 min

1. Begin the experience of reading *The Tyger*.
2. Explain to students that they are "counter poems," or poems, which are best, understood when juxtaposed or closely compared. *The Lamb* and *The Tyger* together create a new meaning.
3. After ask them to read both poems again if they feel it necessary and ask students if they feel differently about either poem. Students should write some notes about their impressions.
4. Students should be given plenty of time to take notes and then share their ideas.
5. Direct students in an informal discussion of their impressions.
  - a. Ask them what they were able to predict and what surprised or enlightened them.

b. Ask them if they disagree with any of the content or have a question regarding it. It would also be appropriate to ask students to discuss the ways in which the poems are characteristic in relation to each other.

6. The instructor will give their next reading assignments and explain the guidelines to follow when reading *Holy Thursday* and *Nurses' Song*.

*Assessment:*

The teacher will collect and evaluate *The Tyger* and *The Lamb* entries and simply calculate the percentage of questions, which were answered to the satisfaction of the teacher.

*Remediation:*

If students show a need for remediation in another semester the teacher may wish to explain acceptable answers from *The Tyger* and *The Lamb* with the student.

**Day 3: William Blake - Poetry Pairing *Holy Thursday***

*Primary Learning Outcomes:*

Students will be able to answer the following:

What does it mean to "juxtapose" two works of literature?

How may one juxtapose the poems from Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience*?

What are the themes of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience*?

*Additional Learning Outcomes:*

Students will be able to answer the following question:

What other works of literature may be juxtaposed as a means for further understanding?

*Area of Focus:*

Students will work as a team to solve problems in recognizing different purposes and methods of writing; identify a writer's point of view, mood, or tone. Consequently they will write and speak critically about literature. Students will read, discuss, and analyze the poems to understand major cultural, religious, philosophical, and political influences of a given period or culture. They will present arguments in orderly and convincing ways.

*Materials:*

Handouts given in previous classes.

*Procedures/Activities:*

Duration: 50 minutes for discussion of presentations - work time at teacher discretion.

Instructions are set for a presentation. They are rather simple but it can be modified to be a written response also.

1. The teacher organizes students into their previously assigned working groups (4 students per group).
2. The teacher will give students a few minutes to review their notes and share responses with each other.
3. The teacher may need to answer questions regarding the procedures, process, and then provide students the time to share their responses on the assigned poems with the whole group.
4. The teacher will give students the guidelines for their class projects.
5. Have students work on the class project inside or outside of class. Allow students in-class time to benefit the group.

6. The teacher will assign *Nurses' Song* for the next class.

Note: Resources for the assignment are not required students should be reminded that they can use the guidelines used for the previous poem.

*Attachments for step 3*

Title: Guidelines for Class Project for Students and Project Presentation for Students (See Appendix C)

Description: These documents may be photocopied as general instructions for the Blake Poetry Pairings Presentation.

*Assessment:*

The teacher will collect students' journal entries.

*Remediation:*

There would be no need for remediation with the activity because it requires a follow-up in the next session.

**Day 4: William Blake - Poetry Pairing Nurses' Song**

Note: The reading guide is almost the same as the previous day with a few exceptions on procedures. This lesson is a continuation of the previous one. Since enough time has to be allocated between sessions to discuss all four poems. (*Nurses' Song* from Innocence and from Experience, *Holy Thursday* from Innocence and from Experience).

*Primary Learning Outcomes:*

Students will be able to answer the following:

What does it mean to "juxtapose" two works of literature?

How may one juxtapose the poems from Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience*?

What are the themes of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience*?

*Additional Learning Outcomes:*

Students will be able to answer the following question:

What other works of literature may be juxtaposed as a means for further understanding?

*Area of Focus:*

Students will work as a team to solve problems in recognizing different purposes and methods of writing; identify a writer's point of view, mood, or tone. Thus they will write and speak critically about literature. Students will read, discuss, and analyze the poems to understand major cultural, religious, philosophical, and political influences of a given period or culture. They will present arguments in orderly and convincing ways.

*Materials:*

Handouts from the previous class.

*Procedures/Activities:*

Duration: 50 minutes for discussion of presentations - work time at teacher discretion.

Instructions are set for a presentation. They are rather simple but it can be modified to be a written response also.

1. The teacher organizes students into working groups (4 students per group).
2. Then, the teacher assigns each group a pair of poems, which may be easily compared/juxtaposed. (*Nurses' Song* from *Innocence and Experience*)
3. The teacher provides students with the directions for work on the juxtaposition presentation.

4. The teacher may wish to give students a few minutes to review the directions.
5. The teacher may need to answer questions regarding the procedures, process, and then provide students with access to the assigned poems.
6. Have students work on the presentations in class for a few minutes.
7. Allow students to present their ideas for the benefit of other groups.

Note: Resources for the assignment are not required students should be reminded that they can use the guidelines for the previous poem.

*Assessment:*

The teacher will collect and evaluate students' journal entries.

*Remediation:*

There would be no need for remediation with the activity.

**Day 5: The Art of William Blake in Students Art**

*Primary Learning Outcomes:*

The readers will be able to respond to the following questions:

What images are presented in the art that call to our attention?

How may these images (visual or written) be used to predict the themes of *Songs of*

*Innocence and Songs of Experience?*

*Additional Learning Outcomes:*

The students will be able to respond to the following:

What are the usual connotations associated with each of the images found in Blake's art or their own art?

How do these images reflect the religious or historical worldview from which Blake came or those of their own?

*Area of Focus:*

Students examine and discuss the role of art as a visual record of humankind's cultural, political, scientific, and religious history as they recognize and discuss themes in Blake's art. This should also allow them to recognize that how to think is different from what to think as they share their interpretations or develop and defend individual interpretations. Students demonstrate critical thinking as they create solutions to problems they may have encountered while reading the poems or producing their class projects. While solving these problems, students are expected to use inferential comprehension skills (e.g., predictions, comparisons, conclusions, and implied main idea). In sharing their views, students' gain insight into human behavior from the study of literature. In being able to carry out the lesson students undertake in reader-response and the instructor only intervenes if necessary.

*Materials and Equipment:*

Student class projects

*Procedures:*

Duration: 50 minutes

1. The teacher will give students time to present their projects. Discussion of projects should be in relation to the poem.
2. The teacher will give the students the set of guidelines they will need for the following session and explain those guidelines.

3. The teacher will present students with the interactive address for the Blake Archive and tell them that they will be looking at Blake's art in the following class.

4. The teacher will remind students to write a journal entry.

*Web Resources:*

Title: William Blake Archive

URL: <http://www.blakearchive.org/>

Annotation: The William Blake Archive is the preeminent place on the Web for images, information, and poetry text. Images are printable.

*Assessment:*

The teacher will collect students' journal entries.

*Remediation:*

There would be no need for remediation with the activity because this session was to follow-up on the poems students had previously read and to build-on for the next session.

**Day 6: The Art of William Blake from The Archive**

Note: This lesson can be assigned as homework in lesson 5 and then in class carry-out the discussion of their ideas.

*Primary Learning Outcomes:*

The readers will be able to respond to the following questions:

What images are present in the art of William Blake?

How may these images be used to predict the themes of *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience*?

*Additional Learning Outcomes:*

The readers will be able to respond to the following:

What are the usual connotations associated with each of the images found in Blake's art?

How do these images reflect the religious or historical worldview from which Blake came or you own?

*Area of Focus:*

Students examine and discuss the role of art as a visual record of humankind's cultural, political, scientific, and religious history as they recognize and discuss themes in Blake's art. This should also allow them to recognize that how to think is different from what to think as they share their interpretations or develop and defend individual interpretations. Students should demonstrate critical thinking as they create solutions to problems they may encounter. While solving these problems, students are expected to use inferential comprehension skills (e.g., predictions, comparisons, conclusions, and implied main idea). In sharing their views students gain insight into human behavior from the study of literature. In being able to carry out the lesson students undertake in reader-response and the instructor only intervenes if necessary.

*Materials and Equipment:*

Printouts of Blake's artwork from Internet source The Blake Archive. A variety of print and non-print resources (e.g. over head projections, computer database, handouts) as parts of the study of literature.

*Procedures/Activities:*

Duration: approx. 50 minutes

1. Explain to students that William Blake was an artist as well as a poet. Explain that William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience* are unique in that the poems have accompanying visual images, which reflect the themes and motifs of the works.
2. The teacher will direct students to the gallery of images. The sources are used to enable readers to search for truths in the images. These sources provide clear full-color images, which students may examine. Students should experience the art and make a list of the images, which they consider to be the most common.
3. Students will be asked in a full group to share their observations regarding the images.
4. The teacher will make a full class list of the student observations. Answers will vary, but students are likely to note the children, flowers, birds, snakes or other animal figures, clouds, and other.
5. The teacher will then ask students to predict what themes these images may portray. A list of these themes could be posted on the classroom board, and students may refer to it during and after the lessons.
6. The teacher may offer guidelines for student responses. (See appendix C)

*Assessment:*

The teacher will collect and evaluate the lists described in Step 3 and 4.

*Extension:*

1. Inviting the class to participate in the viewing of their own art may extend this activity. (Assign a second class-project; however, they should do something different

from the first class project). Students may choose to draw similar images or make a poster or collage of favorite images.

2. Students might also decide to investigate the Blake mythology further as they share their findings of the life of the poet and describe what they have in common with the poet. In small groups students may collaborate to choose the most vital information about the life of the poet. (This is not a focus but some students in both groups have the habit of looking for author biographies)

*Remediation:*

There would be no need for remediation with the activity, although if students find it difficult to determine which images are the most significant it may benefit in future semesters to offer a teacher-directed discussion of the visual elements/motifs and their usual connotation or association.

## Appendix C: Guidelines and Procedures Given to Students

### Procedures for the Teacher Small-Group Discussions

In a period of (50 minutes) the guidelines for procedures are to be followed.

1. Each small-group is to choose a reporter to be chair of the session and report back to the large group to close the session. Members of the group take turns reporting from one day to the next.
2. Copies of the poem are distributed. The teacher reads the poem aloud.
3. A student reads the poem to the whole class. The teacher determines from the reading probable sources of misunderstanding caused by unfamiliar words or by syntax.
4. The teacher invites questions about meanings of unfamiliar words, allusions, and assists without directing interpretation. Students are encouraged to respond to such questions, dwelling on words before context might emerge but is not to be drawn out.
5. Within each group, one member reads the poem aloud.
6. In each group, each student in turn reports an initial reaction, feeling, or observation brought up by the reading, including feelings of frustration or puzzlement. Members of the group do not make remarks on one another's responses until each member of the group has finished sharing.

Note: This is an important step. Students, who do not expect to understand a poem by themselves, even after a few readings, should realize that their initial responses often provide important clues as to how the poem speaks to them or to other students. These students should understand that everyone's opinion is valuable although it may not occupy the center of discussion.

7. Allow students to speak freely and establish an impression of what they have heard. They do not need to take turns to share. They are expected to arrive at some sense of the poem. To keep discussion going, students can be encouraged to read one stanza at a time. Allowing them to see what is or is not in the text.

Note: Students should be encouraged to reread the poem and return to the text as much as possible.

8. About twenty minutes into the discussion, the teacher alerts the class that they have five minutes to prepare their reports. The members of the group take account of any meanings that have emerged and prepare an account that represents their experience of the poem; this account is to be shared with the large group. Students should be discouraged from reading their notes so that they participate in an active process of communication. Reporters are encouraged to build on what the group may have settled on earlier as they hear other group reports and place relevant aspects they had not figured out by themselves earlier. After the first group has reported, the obligation of subsequent reporters is to build on the previous account, agreeing, disagreeing, and reporting any new insights that have occurred in the process. After each report the teacher should ask members of the group if there is anything they would like to supplement the account with or any other opinions they would like to report.

9. The teacher should raise questions based on the reports of the students, relate strands in their group reports, introduce terminology where useful, inquire about their interests in the issues mentioned and reinforce their belief in their own resources.

## **Guideline for Evaluating Journal Entries for Teachers**

### What (is supposed to) Go in the Journal

The prime function of the journal is to develop students' knowledge of their practices of poetry through engagement in dialogue with other participants. It is anything that is written by the students that therefore develops understanding of poetry and can be placed in the journal. These writings provide a basis for continuing dialogue among the course participants.

These journal items could include:

- a. Details of the daily discussion (summary).
- b. Details of conversations, sessions with peers of the subgroups and the whole group.
- c. Questions students encounter to point out in further study.
- d. Examples of the poems to present their views.
- e. Observations of previous reading strategies learned.
- f. Remarks to specific areas of their life experiences.
- g. Reflection on the class sessions.

(Note the same as summary of class session in point a.)

- h. Responses to focus questions that were previously established.

Note: The responses should be based on the guidelines students were given for the entries and according to the focus of particular sessions. These are just the major areas which are likely to be encountered within the responses.

**Guide Questions for *The Lamb* and *The Tyger* for Students**

1. What other works of literature do these poems remind you of?
2. What things do the poems make you think of?
3. List the ways in which the poems are similar.
4. List the differences between the poems.
5. Do the poems seem designed to complete one another? If not, why? If so, how do you know?

Would the experience of reading be different if you had read the poems from Experience before the poems from Innocence? Example *The Tyger* before *The Lamb*. Explain why or why not?

**Procedures for Classroom Discussion for Students (Adapted from Boyle 1993)**

1. After the beginning portion of the class for about 10 minutes you should write a response to the reading due that day. If you have been assigned more than one poem, you may either focus on a single poem or compare and contrast.

Note: Response should be analytical rather than completely emotional and support all ideas with textual evidence.

2. Be prepared to share something with the class. Students' ideas should be noted. Students who share similar ideas should be encouraged to identify how they supported their views in order to create a comparison of the student's awareness of the poem. Those students who have different ideas should also be encouraged to share their views with support, thereby opening a new line of debate in order to find consensus among the ideas that have been shared.

**Procedures for Journal Entries for Students (Adapted from Tucker 2000)**

1. Responding to the Text: Entries should include an observation from the poem, which lines or words made you feel something (what did you like or dislike, agree or disagree with) and why.
2. Sharing Your Perspectives: Share your observations in a group.
3. Evaluating Your Perspectives: How did your entry differ from those of your classmates? What were the differences based on (gender, occupation, age, ethnicity, geography, social status, family background, values, personal experiences, background knowledge, other)?
4. Refining Your Perspective: Write a new entry with final observations of the poem. Consider steps 1 & 2 and questions below.

**Procedures for Journal Entries with Specific Objectives for Students****(Adapted from Tucker 2000)**

(Can be assigned as homework or be used for guide questions during class discussion)

1. Cite three lines you enjoyed in the poem. Explain what they mean to you and why you enjoyed each poem.
2. Write a summary of your reading. Do you know a similar piece with this concept, idea or theme? Compare and contrast the two works.
3. Identify a character, either one that you like or dislike or because you can relate to the character through personal experience. Describe what you like or dislike about that character and explain why. (Although not directly identified, the poems have characters,

for example, *The Tyger* is one and so is *The Lamb*. Some might consider the speaker or the boy a character).

4. What do you see? Do you see people, events or circumstances (time, place, atmosphere, symbols, metaphors, motifs)? Write about the significance of what you see in the poem.

5. Assume the role of the writer. If you could change part of the poem what would you change (word, phrase, scene, character, or other)? Why would you make such a change?

6. Analyze your feelings. What did you feel when reading the poem? Did it sharpen your view on something? Did it challenge an existing belief? Did it confuse you in some way and if so why or how?

### **Guidelines for Class Project for Students**

Note: The group will be divided into small groups. Students should be warned that they have to present their projects and discuss its relation to the poem in the following class.

*Select only one of the following and create in relation to the poem of your choice.*

a. Locate pictures of people or objects that reveal things or situations from the poem.

(Can be done for any of the poems: *The Lamb*, *The Tyger*, *Holy Thursday* from Songs of Innocence and of Experience, *Nurses' Song* from Songs of Innocence and of Experience).

b. Write a diary of inner thoughts of one of the characters of the poem. (Can be applied to all the poems).

c. Improvise and create a scene for the poem. (Can be applied to all poems).

d. Imagine that you were one of those characters, the child figure for instance. Write a letter describing your living conditions and feelings. (Can be applied to all poems).

### **Project Presentation for Students**

#### INSTRUCTIONS FOR BLAKE POETRY JUXTAPOSITION PRESENTATIONS

Each group will be assigned two poems. They are two, which may be juxtaposed, or compared, side-by-side. Each group will employ all members in the task of communicating the techniques by which Blake furthered the themes of the two works.

You will need to work closely with one another, and with the poems or other sources to enumerate the similarities or differences, devices or techniques, and to articulate the themes of the works.

Read the works carefully and discuss your observations in the group. Write about the themes, and find as many literary, structural and rhetorical devices in each work as your group can point out. Then, determine what is new when you juxtapose the two works.

Determine how you will present all the information you have gained. Determine which portion of the project each member will present orally. Be prepared to answer questions. Ask your teacher to clarify whatever questions you may have. This part is done as a presentation but it also includes a written report.

### **Guidelines for the Blake Archive for Students**

1. Do you see the poems any differently from before? If so how?
2. Does seeing a plate change your perceptions of the poem, explain why or how?

3. Do you think there is a reason for the change in colors between the plates? Explain your theory of the possible reason/s.
4. Does such a change in colors change perceptions of the poem?

## Appendix D: Poems

### *The Lamb from Songs of Innocence*

Little lamb, who made thee?  
 Dost thou know who made thee?  
 Gave thee life, and bid thee feed  
 By the stream and o'er the mead;  
 Gave thee clothing of delight,  
 Softest clothing, woolly, bright;  
 Gave thee such a tender voice,  
 Making all the vales rejoice?  
 Little lamb, who made thee?  
 Dost thou know who made thee?

Little lamb, I'll tell thee,  
 Little lamb, I'll tell thee:  
 He is called by thy name,  
 For He calls Himself a Lamb.  
 He is meek, and He is mild;  
 He became a little child.  
 I a child, and thou a lamb,  
 We are called by His name.  
 Little lamb, God bless thee!  
 Little lamb, God bless thee!

### *The Tyger from Songs of Experience*

Tiger, tiger, burning bright  
 In the forests of the night,  
 What immortal hand or eye  
 Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies  
 Burnt the fire of thine eyes?  
 On what wings dare he aspire?  
 What the hand dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder and what art  
 Could twist the sinews of thy heart?  
 And, when thy heart began to beat,  
 What dread hand and what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain?  
 In what furnace was thy brain?  
 What the anvil? what dread grasp

Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears,  
And watered heaven with their tears,  
Did He smile His work to see?  
Did He who made the lamb make thee?

Tiger, tiger, burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye  
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

*Holy Thursday from Songs of Innocence*

'Twas on a holy Thursday, their innocent faces clean,  
The children walking two and two, in red, and blue, and green:  
Grey-headed beadles walked before, with wands as white as snow,  
Till into the high dome of Paul's they like Thames waters flow.

O what a multitude they seemed, these flowers of London town!  
Seated in companies they sit, with radiance all their own.  
The hum of multitudes was there, but multitudes of lambs,  
Thousands of little boys and girls raising their innocent hands.

Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice of song,  
Or like harmonious thunderings the seats of heaven among:  
Beneath them sit the aged men, wise guardians of the poor.  
Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door.

*Holy Thursday from Songs of Experience*

Is this a holy thing to see  
In a rich and fruitful land, -  
Babes reduced to misery,  
Fed with cold and usurous hand?

Is that trembling cry a song?  
Can it be a song of joy?  
And so many children poor?  
It is a land of poverty!

And their sun does never shine,  
And their fields are bleak and bare,  
And their ways are filled with thorns,  
It is eternal winter there.

For where'er the sun does shine,  
 And where'er the rain does fall,  
 Babe can never hunger there,  
 Nor poverty the mind appal.

*Nurse's Song from Songs of Innocence*

When voices of children are heard on the green,  
 And laughing is heard on the hill,  
 My heart is at rest within my breast,  
 And everything else is still.  
 'Then come home, my children, the sun is gone down,  
 And the dews of night arise;  
 Come, come, leave off play, and let us away,  
 Till the morning appears in the skies.'

'No, no, let us play, for it is yet day,  
 And we cannot go to sleep;  
 Besides, in the sky the little birds fly,  
 And the hills are all covered with sheep.'  
 'Well, well, go and play till the light fades away,  
 And then go home to bed.'  
 The little ones leaped, and shouted, and laughed,  
 And all the hills echoed.

*Nurse's Song from Songs of Experience*

When the voices of children are heard on the green,  
 And whisperings are in the dale,  
 The days of my youth rise fresh in my mind,  
 My face turns green and pale.

Then come home, my children, the sun is gone down,  
 And the dews of night arise;  
 Your spring and your day are wasted in play,  
 And your winter and night in disguise.