

From Jury Participation in a Literary Prize to Exploring Literary Studies: Fostering Deeper Engagement with Literature

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the increasingly wide and omnipresent digital content, literary texts remain key to the formation of critical thinkers and well-educated individuals. The question arises: how do we incorporate additional literary activities into the busy schedules of today's students? The Goncourt Bulgaria project offers an innovative approach to fostering interest in literature among students studying a variety of often non-humanities subjects through extracurricular activities. The main aim is to awaken a natural interest in literary theory and history, with participants volunteering to take part in the project. This article examines the benefits of the project, focusing not so much on the improvement of language skills, but mostly on the possibilities for developing an interest in literary studies.

2. THE GONCOURT CHOICE OF BULGARIA PROJECT

2.1 History

The Goncourt Bulgaria project is an initiative that draws inspiration from the prestigious French literary prize Prix Goncourt. The prize has a long tradition and significance in France, and its impact is being extended to the international scene through the International Goncourt Choice, which is aimed at students abroad. The main idea of the project is to provide participants with the opportunity to become acquainted with current French literary works that have been nominated for the Prix Goncourt. They read, analyse and discuss these works and finally choose their favourite, which they present in discussion with the other teams in a literary jury format.

2.2 Project features and milestones

The Goncourt Bulgaria project is structured in several phases. Initially, students are introduced to excerpts from the four selected works from the most recent Académie Goncourt's last selection and are invited to create a sequel to one of them within 800-1000 words. The reading and discussion stage of the novels follows, with participants exchanging views, creating assessment criteria and arguing their points. These discussions are led by the teacher responsible for the team. The exchanges are an important component of the project, as they not only develop students' critical thinking but also lay the groundwork for introducing concepts from literary theory. The final stage involves selecting a winner that represents the preferences of the participants in each team. This selection process is the culmination of months of reading, discussion, and analysis. It is important to note that this selection is not simply an exercise in literary taste, but also involves a serious examination of the artistic merits of the texts, their themes and messages, which requires the use of basic concepts from literary studies.

2.3 Challenges for participants and teachers

Although the project brings many benefits, it also has its challenges. One of them is related to the fact that students are pursuing different majors, have diverse interests, and are not always engaged with literature. Another potential problem is related to time and student workload. Despite their willingness to participate, it is often difficult to find the time for in-depth reading and analysis of the texts, especially when this is not part of their core curriculum. There is also a challenge related to the language barrier. Although students are learning French, their level of proficiency varies, which can make it difficult to understand complex literary texts. This requires teachers to be particularly attentive and to provide extra support when needed. One of the biggest challenges for them is how to motivate students to actively participate and deepen their interest in literature.

2.4 Benefits of participation in the project and its effects on the development of literary interest

The benefits of participating in the Goncourt Bulgaria project are significant and indisputable. In addition to language proficiency, the project fosters essential abilities like critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and teamwork. One of the most interesting characteristics of the project is its potential to awaken interest in literature and literary studies among students who may not have been actively engaged with these topics before. The process of writing, reading, discussing, and analysing texts creates a natural environment for fostering an interest in literature and deepening understanding of literary theory and criticism. The innovative pedagogical approach applied in the project consists of students first working with and interpreting the text, and then learning about literary theory and history as they become interested in doing so. This method, which reverses the traditional sequence of previously taught information, increases students' motivation and encourages them to cultivate their own curiosity about this knowledge. When they receive the information after being convinced of its usefulness for specific tasks, they show more interest and confidence in its value. In this way, literary studies become an enriching element in the perception and understanding of the text, not just a set of facts to memorise.

3. CONCLUSION

Reading and discussing literature should be a joyful experience, yet many educational systems, including Bulgaria's, often stifle this natural curiosity. Even students not specializing in literature can reconnect with the wonder that comes from engaging with literary works. It is essential to view knowledge as an opportunity for discovery. Projects like Goncourt Bulgaria provide ideal platforms for fostering autonomous learning by moving away from rote memorization toward engaging, competitive tasks. Such initiatives are vital for encouraging engagement with literary studies, including core concepts and key figures in the field, but they also offer numerous other benefits, such as the development of linguistic, communicative, and personal competencies.

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