

**Black literature in the English language classroom:
teaching English and building the individual as a
critical and sensitive social being with the short story
“Girl” by Jamaica Kincaid**

*Literatura negra na sala de aula de língua
inglesa: ensinando inglês e construindo o
indivíduo como um ser social crítico e sensível
com o conto “Girl” de Jamaica Kincaid*

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Resumo: Durante algum tempo no ensino de línguas estrangeiras tradicionais a literatura ocupou o lugar de objeto de ensino utilizada no método de tradução. Com as mudanças na metodologia de ensino o texto literário perdeu a importância nas salas de aula de língua inglesa. Entretanto, a literatura está ressurgindo e pedindo espaço nesse contexto em conformidade com os documentos oficiais de educação que atribuem ao ensino de línguas estrangeiras o desenvolvimento de conhecimentos para o exercício da cidadania. Esta pesquisa tem como objetivo a análise do uso de textos literários na sala de aula de língua inglesa que através desse processo de letramento facilita a construção do caráter formativo do estudante, colaborando na reflexão sobre suas práticas sociais e ações como um indivíduo crítico e sensível. O conto “Girl” da escritora negra Jamaica Kincaid é apresentado como alternativa de objeto de estudo trazendo atenção para discussões relevantes da pós-modernidade como o processo de

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colonização responsável por grande parte da formação identitária de vários povos. Partindo dos pressupostos da literatura como texto “humanizador” (CANDIDO, 2012), transgressivo (COSSON, 2016; HOOKS, 2017) e transformador (GONÇALVES; SPECHT, 2018) a pesquisa evidencia fatores de aprendizagem linguística, cultural, social e espiritual dos textos literários, contribuindo para a formação de uma sociedade pautada na equidade, solidariedade e respeito.

Palavras-chave: Ensino de literatura negra. Ensino de língua inglesa. Letramento literário crítico.

Abstract: *For some time in traditional foreign language teaching, literature occupied the place of teaching object used in the translation method. With the changes in teaching methodology, the literary text has lost its importance in English classrooms. However, literature is resurging and asking for space in this context in conformity with the official documents of education that attribute to the teaching of foreign languages the development of knowledge for the exercise of citizenship. This research aims to analyze the use of literary texts in the English language classroom that through this literacy process facilitates the construction of the student's formative character, collaborating in the reflection about his social practices and actions as a critical and sensitive individual. The short story "Girl" by the black writer Jamaica Kincaid is presented as an alternative object of study, bringing attention to relevant discussions of post-modernity, such as the colonization process, which is responsible for a great part of the identity formation of several peoples. Based on the assumptions of literature as a "humanizing" text (CANDIDO, 2012), transgressive (COSSON, 2016; HOOKS, 2017), and transformative (GONÇALVES; SPECHT, 2018) the research highlights linguistic, cultural, social, and spiritual learning factors of literary texts,*

contributing to the formation of a society based on equity, solidarity, and respect.

Palavras-chave: *Black literature teaching. English language teaching. Literary critical literacy.*

1 Introduction

Language "is a human and social product that organizes and exposes common experiences of a given linguistic community"¹ (ARAÚJO; DIAS; LOPES, 2017, p. 1). According to Bagno "language is alive, dynamic, and constantly evolving"² (2007, p. 107). It is in social practice that language is configured and transformed according to the changes in society, human beings, and culture. We represent culture through language (HALL, 2016). "We make sense of things by the way we use them or integrate them into our daily practices"³ (HALL, 2016, p. 21).

Teaching a foreign language as a second language goes far beyond the transmission of codes, vocabulary, and grammar. In English language teaching, besides the need to develop the four skills described in official documents as reading, writing, listening, and speaking, the BNCC (Base Nacional Comum Curricular) states that it is important to develop the individual to exercise their citizenship in a conscious and critical way:

Learning the English language enables students to create new forms of engagement and participation in an increasingly globalized and plural social world, where the

¹ Our translation: "é um produto humano e social que organiza e expõe experiências comuns de determinada comunidade linguística" (p. 1).

² Our translation: "a língua é viva, dinâmica e está em constante evolução" (p. 107).

³ Our translation: "Damos sentido às coisas pelo modo como as utilizamos ou as integramos em nossas práticas cotidianas" (p. 21).

boundaries between countries and personal, local, regional, national and transnational interests are increasingly blurred and contradictory. Thus, the study of the English language can give everyone access to the linguistic knowledge necessary for engagement and participation, contributing to the students' critical agency and to the exercise of active citizenship, besides expanding the possibilities of interaction and mobility, opening new paths of knowledge construction and continuity in studies. It is this formative character that inscribes the learning of English in a perspective of linguistic education, conscious and critical, in which the pedagogical and political dimensions are intrinsically linked⁴ (BRASIL, 2017, p. 241).

In consonance with intrinsic aspects reported in the official documents that guide education in Brazil, this article explores the use of literary text in teaching English in the classroom with the short story "Girl" by the black writer Jamaica Kincaid. Through the short story, it is analyzed that beyond the learning of linguistic knowledge, other aspects that contribute to the construction of the individual as a critical and sensitive social being are involved. The research intends to answer the following questions: what are the main learning aspects developed and involved with teaching the short story "Girl" by Jamaica Kincaid in the English language class? What sensibilities, what cognitive and emotional competencies are developed with the teaching of literature in English language classes, and how much does this teaching interfere with the formation of critical sense?

⁴ Our translation: "Aprender a língua inglesa propicia a criação de novas formas de engajamento e participação dos alunos em um mundo social cada vez mais globalizado e plural, em que as fronteiras entre países e interesses pessoais, locais, regionais, nacionais e transnacionais estão cada vez mais difusas e contraditórias. Assim, o estudo da língua inglesa pode possibilitar a todos o acesso aos saberes linguísticos necessários para engajamento e participação, contribuindo para o agenciamento crítico dos estudantes e para o exercício da cidadania ativa, além de ampliar as possibilidades de interação e mobilidade, abrindo novos percursos de construção de conhecimentos e de continuidade nos estudos. É esse caráter formativo que inscreve a aprendizagem de inglês em uma perspectiva de educação linguística, consciente e crítica, na qual as dimensões pedagógicas e políticas estão intrinsecamente ligadas (p. 241).

At the expense of some studies point out "that the insertion of the literary genre within the English language classroom is still troubled⁵" because "neglected in the daily life of modern society, art takes a back seat⁶" (GONÇALVEZ; SPECHT, 2018, p. 16), this research inspires English teachers to bring black literature into the classroom, seeking the cultural richness of this art for language learning.

Black literature has gone through several obstacles to conquer space in cultural production and have its works recognized as of artistic and intellectual value. Black writers used writing "as a political act" (KILOMBA, 2010, p. 12) and of resistance giving voice to a people that for a long period was "coerced to illiteracy⁷" (GILROY, 2001, p. 244).

Among the English language literary publications is black author Jamaica Kincaid who has her roots in one of England's former colonies, the Caribbean Island country Antigua. The author's texts are woven into the marks of colonialism addressing issues of race, gender, and other wounds inherited from slavery. Urgent and necessary themes bring into focus the voice of subaltern groups. It is in this proposal that the short story "Girl" is presented as a suggestion for a literary text to be worked on in English classes.

The article shows how the introduction of literature in English language learning helps to build a more critical human being, concerned with everyone's social well-being, reinforcing

⁵ Our translation: "que ainda é conturbada a inserção do gênero literário dentro da sala de aula de língua inglesa" (p. 16)

⁶ Our translation: "negligenciada no cotidiano da sociedade moderna, a arte ocupa um segundo plano" (p. 16).

⁷ Our translation: "coagidos ao analfabetismo".

the sense of community and otherness, and respecting cultural differences. It is based on this pathway with some theoretical perspectives that the research is developed seeking to bring black authors and the implications of black authorship, presenting the short story "Girl" as a humanizing transgressor text and relating literature in English language teaching with the power of transformation that a literary text can have.

2 Methodology

The analysis was carried out with a literature review of recent research on the use of literary texts for English language teaching, with the BNCC and with theorists such as Antonio Candido, Rildo Cosson, Stuart Hall, Bell Hooks, Joanne Collie and Stephen Slater, Gillian Lazar, among others. The short story "Girl" by the author Jamaica Kincaid was related to aspects developed in the literacy process with this literary text in English language classes.

For exposing issues related to black literature published in the English language, other authors dialogue in the discussions presented in the article such as Grada Kilomba with his work "Plantation Memories" and Paul Gilroy with his book "Black Atlantic". To guide us on the Brazilian black literary production and its main characteristics Cuti arises with "Literatura Negro-Brasileira".

3 Jamaica Kincaid and Black authors

The writer Jamaica Kincaid with her given name of Elaine Potter Richardson, was born in Antigua in the capital Saint John's and moved to the United States at the age of seventeen in 1973.

She becomes a freelance writer in 1973 changing her name to Jamaica Kincaid and takes up a column in the New Yorker magazine in 1976 (SILVA, 2012). About the country Antigua:

Located to the east of Central America, in the Caribbean Sea, the island of Antigua is the largest and most important in relation to the other two (Redonda and Barbuda) that form the country. It was colonized by the British and only became independent in 1981; having more than 90% of the population formed by Afro-Caribbeans its main activity is tourism, which employs at least 50% of the people, the other part lives mainly from agriculture and livestock⁸ (SILVA, 2012, p. 1).

Kincaid's texts are related to issues of race, gender, colonialism, and its consequences (SILVA, 2012). These are themes addressed by black writers and are related to the formation of their identities. These are historical facts that cross from the past to the present, as it is the answer to numerous social problems of today. Countries that inherited slavery recognize themselves in the same pain:

Black Atlantic cultures have created vehicles of consolation through the mediation of suffering. They specify aesthetic and counter-aesthetic forms and a distinct dramaturgy of remembrance that characteristically separated genealogy from geography, and the act of coping from that of belonging⁹ (GILROY, 2011, p. 13).

In Brazil, the production of black literature "has been growing in recent years and this movement has been observed

⁸ Our translation: Localizada ao leste da América Central, no mar do Caribe, a ilha de Antígua é a maior e mais importante em relação às outras duas (Redonda e Barbuda) que formam o país. Foi colonizada por britânicos e só tornou-se independente em 1981; tendo mais de 90% da população formada por afrocaribenhos tem como principal atividade o turismo, que emprega pelo menos 50% do povo, a outra parte vive principalmente da agricultura e pecuária (p. 1).

⁹ Our translation: As culturas do Atlântico negro criaram veículos de consolação através da mediação do sofrimento. Elas especificam formas estéticas e contra-estéticas e uma distinta dramaturgia da recordação que caracteristicamente separaram a genealogia da geografia, e o ato de lidar com o de pertencer (GILROY, 2011, p. 13).

following feminist and anti-racist movements¹⁰ (CAETANO; GEISLER, 2022, p. 187). Writers who find in literature "an open path to recognize themselves, by purging the historical humiliation suffered and purging their ghosts created by racial discrimination"¹¹ (CUTI, 2010, p. 75).

4 The short story "Girl" as a humanizing transgressive text

To Antonio Candido, literature is related to a human right and comprises "all creations of poetic, fictional or dramatic touch, at all levels of society, in all types of culture, from what we call folklore, legend, to the most complex and difficult forms of production"¹² (2012, p. 7). It is linked to the fabulation that is inherent to every man, illiterate or erudite, and independent of the will like the dream during sleep. The universe of fabrication "manifests itself from the amorous or economic reverie on the bus to the attention fixed on the television soap opera or in the followed reading of a novel"¹³ (CANDIDO, 2012, p. 7). Satisfying this need constitutes a right that Candido argues is perhaps necessary for social and psychic equilibrium (CANDIDO, 2012).

Cuti (2010) describes that "literature is power, the power to convince, to feed the imaginary, an inspiring source of thought

¹⁰ Our translation: "vem crescendo nos últimos anos e tem-se observado esse movimento seguindo movimentos feministas e antirracistas" (p. 187).

¹¹ Our translation: "um caminho aberto para reconhecer a si mesmo, por meio da purgação da histórica humilhação sofrida e do expurgo de seus fantasmas criados pela discriminação racial" (p. 75).

¹² Our translation: "todas as criações de toque poético, ficcional ou dramático, em todos os níveis de sociedade, em todos os tipos de cultura, desde o que chamamos de folclore, lenda, até as formas mais complexas e difíceis de produção" (p. 7).

¹³ Our translation: "manifesta desde o devaneio amoroso ou econômico no ônibus até a atenção fixada na novela de televisão ou na leitura seguida de um romance" (p. 7).

and action¹⁴" (p. 12). One can thus see the relationship that the imaginary has for an action to occur and what literature can transform. Literature has a humanizing character "it is an indispensable factor of humanization and, being so, confirms man in his humanity, also because it acts largely on the subconscious and the unconscious¹⁵" (CANDIDO, 2012, p. 7). For this reason, "literature has been a powerful instrument of instruction and education¹⁶" (CANDIDO, 2012, p. 8) in societies.

Candido's (2012) and Cuti's (2010) sense and definition of literature align with Llosa's (2010, p. 62):

Reading is learning what and how we are, in all our humanity, with our actions, our dreams and our ghosts, both in the public space and in the privacy of our consciousness. This knowledge is found only in literature. Not even the other branches of the human sciences - philosophy, history or the arts - have managed to preserve this integrative vision in an accessible discourse, for they too have succumbed to the dominance of specialization. The fraternal bond that literature establishes between human beings transcends all temporal barriers. The sense of being part of the collective experience across time and space is culture's greatest achievement, and nothing contributes more to renewing it with each generation than literature¹⁷.(LLOSA, 2010, p. 62).

¹⁴ Our translation: "literatura é poder, poder de convencimento, de alimentar o imaginário, fonte inspiradora do pensamento e da ação" (p. 12).

¹⁵ Our translation: "é fator indispensável de humanização e, sendo assim, confirma o homem na sua humanidade, inclusive porque atua em grande parte no subconsciente e no inconsciente" (p. 7).

¹⁶ Our translation: "a literatura tem sido um instrumento poderoso de instrução e educação" (p. 8).

¹⁷ Our translation: "Ler é aprender o que e como somos, em toda a nossa humanidade, com nossas ações, nossos sonhos e nossos fantasmas, tanto no espaço público como na privacidade de nossa consciência. Esse conhecimento se encontra apenas na literatura. Nem mesmo os outros ramos das ciências humanas – a filosofia, a história ou as artes – conseguiram preservar essa visão integradora em um discurso acessível, pois também eles sucumbiram ao domínio da especialização. O elo fraternal que a literatura estabelece entre os seres humanos transcende todas as barreiras temporais. A sensação de ser parte da experiência coletiva através do tempo e do espaço é a maior conquista da cultura, e nada contribui mais para renová-la a cada geração do que a literatura" (p. 62).

Given the arguments for the importance of literature in man's life, one has the incentive for English language teachers to use literary texts in the classroom. The transforming power of literary texts is extraordinary and proposes beyond all knowledge, hope, a certain power of change.

Jamaica Kincaid published *At the Bottom of The River* in 1983 and it is in this work that the short story "Girl" is found alongside a collection of short stories. Other works by the author include *Annie John* (1985), *A Small Place* (1988), *Lucy* (1990), *The Autobiography of My Mother* (1996), *My Brother* (1997), *My Garden* (1999) e *Mr. Potter*. Her texts "take the reader back to a context of colonial servitude history, in which her formation process in Antigua took place"¹⁸ (RAMOS, 2007, p. 121) and "confirm the emphasis on writing and rewriting events taken from her own experience"¹⁹ (AZEVEDO, 2008, p. 94).

The short story is written in a single paragraph in which the mother tells her daughter how she should behave and do the chores that a girl should do. "Wash the white clothes on Monday and put them on the stone heap; wash the color clothes on Tuesday and put them on the clothesline to dry; don't walk bare-head in the hot sun" (KINCAID, 2007, p. 125). The text takes us back to another time, the past, but it still has strong traces of what a woman's role is today. "Soak your little cloths right after you take them off; when buying cotton to make yourself a nice blouse, be sure that it doesn't have gum in it, because that way it won't hold up well after a wash" (KINCAID, 2007, p. 125).

¹⁸ Our translation: "remetem ao leitor a um contexto de história de servidão colonial, no qual se deu seu processo de formação em Antigua" (p. 121).

¹⁹ Our translation: "vêm confirmar a ênfase na escritura e re-escritura de eventos retirados de sua própria experiência" (p. 94).

The mother's advice takes up the entire tale with only two sentences spoken by the daughter, who listens to her mother in silence throughout the text.

[...] is it true that you sing benna in Sunday school?; always eat your food in such a way that it won't turn someone else's stomach; on Sundays try to walk like a lady and not like the slut you are so bent on becoming; don't sing benna in Sunday school; you mustn't speak to wharf-rat boys, not even to give directions; don't eat fruits on the street—flies will follow you; but I don't sing benna on Sundays at all and never in Sunday school; this is how to sew on a button [...] (KINCAID, 2012, p. 125).

The daughter in the place of the one who suffers oppression and does not react. The mother is the one who reproduces a sexist discourse. The story dialogues and questions the condition of women in society, bringing into focus "correct forms" of behavior for a young woman that are perhaps part of the writer's memory and are still part of the memory and reality of many women. In a certain passage, the mother uses an offensive form to refer to her daughter's behavior. Kincaid makes her black female voice a cry to denounce gender violence. According to Kilomba cited by Cunha and Martins (2020) discussions between race and gender are inseparable. "Gender impacts the construction of 'race' and the experience of racism" (KILOMBA, 2010, p. 94).

Jamaica Kincaid is a black woman who writes literature. According to Cuti (2010) in Brazil it was in the last decades of the 20th century that black writers gained prominence. The author in the position of "black-authored body-writing is crossed by other oceans of unspoken words, by other islands of power²⁰" (CUNHA; MARTINS, 2020, p. 76) that only the black body experiences.

²⁰ Our translation: "corpo-escrita de autoria negra é atravessado por outros oceanos de palavras não ditas, por outras ilhas de poder" (p. 76).

"Florentina (2018) tells us that the literature produced by black women can be read as a result of these women's historical reaction to epistemicide, silencing, and structured machismo²¹" (CUNHA: MARTINS, 2020, p. 74).

Rildo Cosson (2016, p. 17) idealizes a transgressive work with literature in which "a proposal of critical literary literacy can provide the (re) construction of the world and of standardized discourses of the so-called literate society, giving rise to a new making of idiom and language, proper to each subject²²". Defender of Paulo Freire, Bell Hooks in her book *Teaching to Transgress* (2017) recognizes that "education as a practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn²³" (p. 25). The author believes that the teacher's job "is not to simply share information, but to participate in the intellectual and spiritual growth²⁴" of students (HOOKS, 2017, p. 25). And thus, "inspiring values such as sensitivity, solidarity, respect, and unity, which are fundamental to life in society²⁵" (BERTONHA, 2021, p. 20).

5 Literature in English language teaching

A literary text is very effective in contributing to the English language teaching process and several researchers are

²¹ Our translation: "Florentina (2018) nos diz que a literatura produzida por mulheres negras pode ser lida como resultado da reação histórica dessas mulheres ao epistemicídio, ao silenciamento e ao machismo estruturado" (p. 74).

²² Our translation: "uma proposta de letramento literário crítico, pode propiciar a (re) construção do mundo e de discursos padronizados da chamada sociedade letrada, originando um novo fazer da língua e da linguagem, próprio de cada sujeito" (p. 17).

²³ Our translation: "educação como prática da liberdade é um jeito de ensinar que qualquer um pode aprender" (p. 25).

²⁴ Our translation: "não é o de simplesmente partilhar informação, mas sim o de participar do crescimento intelectual e espiritual" (p. 25).

²⁵ Our translation: "inspirando valores como a sensibilidade, a solidariedade, o respeito e a união, fundamentais para a vida em sociedade" (p. 20).

unanimous about that (LAGO; LIMA, 2013). The benefits of literature in the classroom cover both the dimension of linguistic learning, such as vocabulary and syntactic constructions and the social and individual dimension by reviving "human emotions, making the student more sensitive to the world's problems, more aware of other realities²⁶" (SIVASUBRAMANIAM, 2004 apud LAGO; LIMA, 2013, p. 271).

It is a fact that "by resisting its own historicity and exploring a language that appeals to the subject's greatest subjectivities, the potential for critical formation by literature²⁷" is real. If using the aesthetic experience "the literary text builds and develops a unique language²⁸" (GONÇALVES; SPECHT, 2018, p. 3), "a contact link between the linguistic and the cultural²⁹" (ARAÚJO; DIAS; LOPES, 2017, p. 2).

According to Gonçalves and Specht (2018, p. 7), "dwells in the intricate nature of literature its ability to create in us, new lenses for perception of the world - if it were 'simpler', perhaps it would not be so transformative³⁰". The authors acknowledge the difficulties of inserting literary texts into the classroom, but attribute this due to their complexity and "trajectory for vocabular and intellectual growth³¹" (2018. p. 7). It is in this process of reading

²⁶ Our translation: "as emoções humanas, tornando o aluno mais sensível aos problemas do mundo, mais atento a outras realidades" (p. 271).

²⁷ Our translation: "resistindo a sua própria historicidade e explorando uma linguagem que apela às maiores subjetividades do sujeito, o potencial de formação crítica por parte da literatura" (p. 3).

²⁸ Our translation: "o texto literário se constrói e desenvolve uma linguagem única" (p. 3).

²⁹ Our translation: "um elo de contato entre o linguístico e o cultural" (p. 2).

³⁰ Our translation: "mora na intrincada natureza da literatura a sua capacidade de criar em nós, novas lentes para percepção do mundo – se ela fosse "mais simples", talvez não fosse tão transformadora" (p. 7).

³¹ Our translation: "trajetória para crescimento vocabular e intelectual" (p. 7).

and apprehension of the text that the expansion of knowledge³² and broad cultural enrichment" occurs (ARAÚJO; DIAS; LOPES, 2017, p. 6), establishing "relationships with the reality that surrounds them³³" (MATOS; VASCONCELOS, 2018, p. 5).

In the view of Collie and Slater (1987) the literary text in the classroom "was sometimes tarred with an 'elitist' brush and reserved for the most advanced level of study" (p. 4) for the reason that "for an arsenal of critical terms, the 'metalanguage' of literary studies, convinced many teachers that it could not be studied satisfactorily in the foreign language" (p. 4-5). The authors' work "Literature in Language Classroom" encourages teachers to use literature at all levels down to the lowest, since

[...] literature, which speaks to the heart as much as to the mind, provides material with some emotional colour, that can make fuller contact with the learner's own life, and can thus counterbalance the more fragmented effect of many collections of texts used in the classroom. (COLLIE; SLATER, 1987, p. 5).

The book provides "ideas, approaches and techniques" (p. 5) that have worked well in classrooms, describes the benefits of literature in language teaching and cites appropriate ways to work with these texts each a different technique for novels, poems and short stories (COLLIE; SLATER, 1987).

According to these authors, literature is beneficial in the language learning process because it is valuable authentic material, is cultural and language enrichment and it makes a personal involvement. Literary texts are "written material which is 'important' in the sense that it says something about fundamental human issues, and which is enduring rather than

³² Our translation: e o enriquecimento cultural amplo" (p. 6).

³³ Our translation: "relações com a realidade que os cerca" (p. 5).

ephemeral”. It is in reading these texts in which the language is intended for native speakers that the students “gain additional familiarity with many different linguistic uses, forms and conventions of the written mode: with irony, exposition, argument, narration, and so on” (COLLIE; SLATER, 1987, p. 6).

Being in direct actual contact with native speakers for many students is not always possible, but other ways of understanding can be adopted “so that they gain an understanding of the way of life of the country: radio programmes, films or videos, newspapers, and, last but not least, literary works” (COLLIE; SLATER, 1987, p. 6). The literary text

[...] offers a full and vivid context in which characters from many social backgrounds can be depicted. A reader can discover their thoughts, feelings, customs, possessions; what they buy, believe in, fear, enjoy; how they speak and behave behind closed doors. This vivid imagined world can quickly give the foreign reader a feel for the codes and preoccupations that structure a real society. Reading the literature of a historical period is, after all, one of the ways we have to help us imagine what life was like in that other foreign territory: our own country’s past. Literature is perhaps best seen as a complement to other materials used to increase the foreign learner’s insight into the country whose language is being learnt. (COLLIE; SLATER, 1987, p. 6).

The literary text as a complement to the English teaching practices provides an enrichment in vocabulary, even if they are not words normally used in everyday life. “Literature provides a rich context in which individual lexical or syntactical items are made more memorable” (COLLIE; SLATER, 1987, p. 6), providing “meaningful and memorable contexts for processing and interpreting new language” (LAZAR, 2009, p. 17). Lazar describes that (2009, p. 17) “literature is a particularly good source for developing students’ abilities to infer meaning and to make

interpretations” and that there are multiple meanings to be understood that are usually not explicit.

There is an emotional involvement in the development of a story, the reader is eager to know what happens as the text unfolds, “he or she feels close to certain characters and shares their emotional responses. The language becomes ‘transparent’ – the fiction summons the whole person into its own world” (COLLIE; SLATER, 1987, p. 7).

In choosing the texts to be read and studied in class is “important to choose books, therefore, which are relevant to the life experiences, emotions, or dreams of the learner” and the ideal is to use “a work that is not too much above the students’ normal reading proficiency” (COLLIE; SLATER, 1987, p. 8). By analyzing and taking into consideration the proficiency level and age of the students, it is possible to use literary texts in English language classes from children to adults, seeking strategies to “insert it since early childhood education³⁴” (MATOS; VASCONCELOS, 2018, p. 4).

There are some obstacles when using literary texts in language teaching. In the view of Collie and Slater (1987, p. 9):

Often the sheer difficulties of detailed comprehension posed by the intricacy or linguistic subtlety of the language turn the teaching of literature into a massive process of explanation by the teacher or even of translation, with the greater proportion of available classroom time devoted to a step by step exegetical exercise led by the teacher.

It is indicated to work the literary texts in a more relaxed way and without being used “as an evaluative requirement, but as

³⁴ Our translation: “inserir-la desde a educação infantil” (p. 4)

a delightful reading, of discoveries and inspirations³⁵" and "a teacher, who has the habit of reading, has an easy time persuading students to carry out the reading of some texts or literary works³⁶" (MATOS; VASCONCELOS, 2018, p. 2). Rita Baleiro reports that students tend to give up because they find literary texts difficult to read, and this dilemma can be solved by encouraging students toward these types of texts, "the continuous reading experience will surely help students become less intimidated and more familiar with literature" (2010, p. 4-5).

A suggestion to make reading more attractive is "reading a series of passages from different works produces more variety in the classroom, so that the teacher has a greater chance of avoiding monotony" (COLLIE; SLATER, 1987, p. 11). By using fragments of works there is the possibility of maintaining greater attention on the part of students "instead of very long and boring works, the teacher can adapt the literary approach by using paradidactic or simplified versions of the texts, also resources such as summaries, biographies of authors, films based on literary works³⁷" (ARAÚJO; DIAS; LOPES, 2017, p. 6).

6 Conclusion

The teaching of English as a foreign language has undergone several changes in its methodologies and currently, a number of researchers recognize the benefits of working with

³⁵ Our translation: "como requisito avaliativo, mas como uma leitura de deleite, de descobertas e de inspirações" (p. 2).

³⁶ Our translation: "um professor, que tem o hábito de ler, tem facilidade em persuadir os alunos para realizar a leitura de alguns textos ou de obras literárias" (p. 2).

³⁷ Our translation: "em vez de obras muito extensas e enfadonhas, o professor pode adaptar a abordagem literária utilizando-se de paradidáticos ou versões simplificadas dos textos, também de recursos como resumos, biografias de autores, filmes baseados em obras literárias" (p. 6).

literary texts in the classroom. Different authors have written about the learning that occurs in this literacy process that goes beyond linguistic knowledge. Bringing black authors into the classroom, especially black women authors is a way to teach by humanizing, transgressing, and transforming.

It is in the way the teacher works with literary texts and in the proposal that these classes have that the students' production of knowledge is drawn. Language learning becomes meaningful when there is a construction of meaning, and literature offers this. It has a "personality-forming role³⁸" and "great is the humanizing power³⁹" of literary works. (CANDIDO, 2012 p.8). "Nothing protects us better from the stupidity of prejudice, racism, xenophobia, religious or political sectarianism⁴⁰" than literature (LLOSA, 2010, p. 61).

Kincaid's short story "Girl" is related to issues of racism, gender, and the process of colonialism and represents other black women writers who echo one voice. Black women authors are currently fighting for a space in literature and are part of the feminist and anti-racist movements. The text questions the condition of women in society, the silence of those who suffer oppression, relevant topics for discussion and cultural enrichment, which enables students to rethink about themselves and their relationship with others.

Approaching authors from countries other than North America or the United Kingdom is to bring to students' attention the expansion of the English language that occurred through the

³⁸ Our translation: "papel formador da personalidade" (p. 8).

³⁹ Our translation: "é grande o poder humanizador" (p. 8).

⁴⁰ Our translation: "Nada nos protege melhor da estupidez do preconceito, do racismo, da xenofobia, do sectarismo religioso ou político" (p. 61).

colonies and to bring to light the consequences generated by this process of colonialism. Cuti (2010) relates that the pain inherited by black people is denounced by art, reinforcing their racial identity.

It is significant that learning a foreign language is connected to understanding the "place of other cultures in the world, in a deeper way, understanding the oppressions that permeate their cultures and the cultures⁴¹" of other languages. It is in the practice of developing criticality that teachers will form individuals concerned with essential aspects of life such as the "exercise of reflection, the acquisition of knowledge, [...], the tuning of emotions, the ability to penetrate the problems of life, a sense of beauty, the perception of the complexity of the world and beings⁴²" (CANDIDO, 2012 p. 13), and the cultivation of love.

⁴¹ Our translation: "lugar das outras culturas do mundo, de uma forma mais profunda, compreendendo as opressões que permeiam as suas culturas e as culturas" (p. 126).

⁴² Our translation: "exercício da reflexão, a aquisição do saber, [...] o afinamento das emoções, a capacidade de penetrar nos problemas da vida, senso de beleza, a percepção da complexidade do mundo e dos seres" (p. 13).

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