



READING POETRY IN THE CONTEMPORARY CLASSROOM: FROM ROMANTIC IMAGINATION TO FROSTIAN REALISM

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Abstract :

Poetry in the contemporary classroom is often approached as an examination-oriented literary form: students identify poetic devices, explain prescribed lines, and reproduce interpretations in written answers. Such practices can secure textual familiarity, but they may also narrow poetry's larger educational possibilities. This article proposes that the contrasting poetic visions of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Robert Frost can provide a productive framework for rethinking poetry education. Rather than treating these poets as isolated representatives of Romanticism and modern American poetry, the article reads them as stages in a pedagogical movement from imaginative possibility to interpretive complexity and finally to an active engagement with lived reality. Shelley's theory of imagination links poetry with sympathy, moral enlargement, and the capacity to perceive beyond immediate limitations. Coleridge's conception of imagination introduces synthesis, reconciliation, ambiguity, and reflective interpretation. Frost, while not reducible to a simple realist, repeatedly places abstract ideas under pressure from ordinary experience, metaphor, choice, uncertainty, and human relationships. Drawing on qualitative, interpretive and comparative textual analysis, the article develops a pedagogical continuum—Imagine, Interpret, Engage with Reality. It argues that poetry can become a site in which contemporary learners learn not only what a poem means but how meaning is made, tested, revised, and related to experience. The article also considers the role of poetry in developing critical and creative thinking, empathy, reflective judgement, and student-centred learning. The proposed model is not presented as an empirical classroom intervention; rather, it offers a theoretically grounded framework that teachers may adapt for literary education.

Keywords: poetry pedagogy, contemporary classroom, Shelley, Coleridge, Robert Frost, imagination, realism, critical thinking, literary education, metaphor

1. Introduction

The place of poetry in education has always involved a tension between literary appreciation and instrumental learning. In many classrooms, especially where examinations strongly influence teaching practices, poems are converted into manageable units of information: theme, tone, figure of speech, central idea, important lines, and probable questions. Such practices are not inherently wrong, because students need textual knowledge and examination skills. The difficulty begins when these activities become the whole purpose of reading poetry. A poem then becomes something to be decoded for an answer rather than an encounter that can alter a reader's questions, perceptions, and relations with language.

The contemporary classroom makes this question particularly significant. Students encounter an unprecedented quantity of verbal and visual material through digital media. They move rapidly between short messages, images, videos, advertisements, social-media posts, news, and academic texts. In such an environment, the educational value of poetry cannot rest only on its antiquity or cultural prestige. Poetry must be understood as a distinctive form of attention: it asks readers to notice language closely, tolerate ambiguity, make connections, interpret images, listen to voice and rhythm, and consider meanings that cannot always be reduced to a single proposition.

Recent pedagogical scholarship supports the view that poetry can contribute to creative, metaphorical, critical, affective, and social dimensions of learning. Creely, Bao, and Waterhouse, for example, describe poetry as a creative practice capable of supporting critical and creative thinking and of contributing to affective and social learning. Research on poetry and critical thinking has likewise explored the possibility of creating classroom conditions in which students reason through interpretation rather than simply receive predetermined meanings. These approaches suggest that poetry is not merely an object of literary study; it can also become a method of intellectual activity.

This article develops that possibility through a comparative reading of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Robert Frost. The three poets are separated by period, national context, and literary tradition, yet their poetry and poetics can be placed in a productive pedagogical sequence. Shelley gives unusual emphasis to imagination and sympathy; Coleridge theorises imagination as a synthetic and reconciling power; Frost repeatedly brings ideas into contact with ordinary experience, uncertainty, social boundaries, and metaphor. The movement proposed here is therefore not a claim of direct historical influence from Shelley to Coleridge to Frost. It is a pedagogical arrangement that allows teachers to move students through three related intellectual operations: imagining possibilities, interpreting complexity, and engaging critically with reality.

The central argument is that poetry education can become richer when students are invited to move through these operations rather than being confined to the search for a fixed “meaning” of a poem. The article consequently asks: How can the poetic visions of Shelley, Coleridge, and Frost contribute to imagination, critical interpretation, emotional reflection, and engagement with lived reality among contemporary learners? A related question concerns how literary education can preserve aesthetic experience while also developing transferable habits of thought.

2. Research Problem and Context

The problem addressed here is not that poetry is absent from the classroom. Poetry is frequently present in school and university curricula. The problem is the manner in which it may be framed. When the teaching of a poem is dominated by teacher-supplied explanation, students can learn that interpretation is an authority possessed by the teacher or textbook. The learner’s role becomes one of recognition and reproduction. Such an approach can discourage intellectual risk-taking: a student may notice an image or formulate a different interpretation but hesitate to express it because the expected answer appears to be predetermined.

A second difficulty is the tendency to treat literary periods as rigid compartments. Shelley is labelled a Romantic poet, Coleridge a major Romantic theorist and poet, and Frost a modern American poet. These classifications are useful historically, but they can hide the cognitive relationships among their works. For a teacher, the more productive question may be: What does each poet ask the reader to do? Shelley frequently asks the reader to imagine connections among human beings and between human consciousness and the natural world. Coleridge asks readers to inhabit uncertainty, recognise the interaction of imagination and understanding, and perceive unity within apparent oppositions. Frost repeatedly asks readers to interpret ordinary situations whose meanings are unstable or multiple.

The classroom can therefore use literary history not as a sequence to memorise but as a sequence of intellectual possibilities. Such a pedagogy does not erase historical difference. On the contrary, it makes historical difference meaningful by showing students how changing literary forms and ideas produce changing ways of seeing.

3. Research Gap

Existing scholarship on Shelley, Coleridge, and Frost is extensive, but much of it concentrates on individual poets, historical contexts, literary movements, poetics, metaphor, imagination, or close readings of particular works. Similarly, scholarship on poetry pedagogy increasingly investigates creativity, critical thinking, literacy, and affective learning. What remains comparatively underdeveloped is a sustained pedagogical framework that brings Shelley’s imaginative and ethical poetics, Coleridge’s theory of synthetic imagination, and Frost’s engagement with metaphor and lived experience into one comparative classroom model.

The gap addressed by this article is therefore not a lack of scholarship on any one poet. It is the limited attention given to the pedagogical relationship among these distinct poetic modes. The article proposes that the transition from Romantic imaginative possibility to Coleridgean complexity and Frostian engagement with ordinary reality can be converted into a sequence of learning operations. This framework provides a bridge between literary interpretation and contemporary educational aims without reducing poetry to a utilitarian instrument.

4. Research Questions

1. How can Shelley's conception of imagination and sympathy contribute to imaginative and empathetic learning in the contemporary classroom?
2. How can Coleridge's conception of imagination as a synthetic and reconciling power support interpretive and reflective thinking?
3. How can Frost's poetry and poetics encourage students to test ideas against ordinary experience, metaphor, uncertainty, and human choice?
4. What pedagogical possibilities emerge when these three poetic modes are connected through the continuum Imagine–Interpret–Engage with Reality?

5. Objectives

The article aims to:

1. examine the educational implications of selected aspects of Shelley's, Coleridge's, and Frost's poetics;
2. establish a comparative relationship among imagination, interpretive complexity, and engagement with lived reality;
3. connect literary analysis with contemporary objectives such as critical thinking, creativity, empathy, and reflective judgement;
4. propose a practical but theoretically grounded framework for teaching poetry.

6. Methodology

This is a qualitative, interpretive and comparative study based primarily on textual analysis. Selected poems and prose writings by Shelley, Coleridge, and Frost are read alongside relevant scholarship in Romantic studies, Frost studies, and poetry pedagogy. The analysis is thematic rather than statistical. It identifies concepts that can be translated into classroom operations without claiming that the three poets form a historically continuous literary movement.

The pedagogical claims are conceptual rather than empirical. The article does not report data from a controlled classroom experiment, nor does it claim that every student will respond identically to the proposed model. Instead, it develops a theoretically informed teaching framework that can be adapted, tested, and evaluated by teachers in particular educational contexts.

7. Theoretical Framework: Poetry as a Mode of Thinking

The framework begins with a broad understanding of poetry as a form of cognition. Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* associates imagination with synthesis and with the capacity to perceive relationships that analytical reasoning alone may not provide. More importantly for education, Shelley links imagination with sympathy: to imagine intensely and comprehensively is to be capable of entering, imaginatively, into the experience of others. His account therefore makes imagination both aesthetic and ethical.

Coleridge gives the concept a different philosophical depth. In *Biographia Literaria*, he distinguishes imagination from mere fancy and describes imagination in terms of synthesis, unity, and the reconciliation of opposites. His formulation encourages readers to understand meaning as an active process in which apparently separate elements are brought into relation. For classroom practice, this is valuable because it shifts students away from the assumption that interpretation consists only of finding information already present in a poem.

Frost provides a different but complementary emphasis. His reflections on poetry repeatedly connect metaphor with thought. Judith Oster's discussion of Frost's poetry of metaphor highlights Frost's own claim that metaphor is central to thinking and to education by poetry. Frost's poems frequently begin in ordinary scenes but complicate the reader's assumptions. A wall, a path, snow, trees, a neighbour, or a domestic conversation can become a site of philosophical uncertainty. The ordinary is not merely represented; it becomes a means of thinking.

The resulting theoretical framework can be represented as follows:

Shelley — IMAGINE

Possibility, sympathy, creative perception

Coleridge — INTERPRET

Synthesis, ambiguity, complexity, reconciliation

Frost — ENGAGE WITH REALITY

Experience, metaphor, uncertainty, choice, consequence

This sequence should not be treated as a hierarchy. Frost is not "better" than Shelley, and Coleridge is not simply a bridge between them. Each poetic mode offers a different intellectual resource. The pedagogical value lies in placing the modes into conversation.

8. Shelley: Imagination, Sympathy and Creative Possibility

Shelley's defence of poetry provides one of the most explicit theoretical foundations for understanding literature as an educational activity. His distinction between reason and imagination is not a simple rejection of reason. Rather, he assigns imagination the capacity to synthesise and perceive relationships. His celebrated claim that poetry enlarges the circumference of imagination presents reading as an expansion of the learner's perceptual and emotional possibilities.

For contemporary students, this idea can be converted into a classroom practice of imaginative displacement. Instead of asking only "What is the poet saying?", the teacher can ask: "What would the situation look like from another consciousness?" Such a question is especially relevant to poems involving nature, conflict, suffering, freedom, or social relations.

In "Ode to the West Wind," for example, the natural force is not simply a decorative landscape image. The wind becomes associated with transformation, destruction, renewal, poetic aspiration, and historical change. A classroom discussion can begin with the literal wind and gradually ask students to identify the meanings that emerge when the wind becomes a figure for change. Students can then create alternative metaphors for a force that changes their own social or educational environment. The purpose is not to ask students to imitate Shelley but to experience the movement from perception to imaginative association.

"To a Skylark" similarly opens possibilities for discussing the relationship between human limitation and imaginative aspiration. The bird's song becomes a stimulus for the speaker's reflection on human joy, knowledge, and desire. Students can examine why the poet needs an apparently non-human voice to think about human experience. The activity moves from close reading toward perspective-taking.

Shelley's connection between imagination and sympathy also has important affective implications. When students encounter unfamiliar experiences in poetry, they do not automatically acquire empathy; literature should not be treated as a guaranteed moral technology. Nevertheless, poetry can provide occasions for imaginative perspective-taking. A careful teacher can ask students to distinguish between understanding another perspective and claiming to possess another person's experience. This distinction encourages ethical rather than sentimental reading.

The educational significance of Shelley therefore lies in possibility. Poetry becomes a space where learners can imagine relationships that are not immediately visible, test alternative perspectives, and recognise that perception is not fixed. In a classroom increasingly concerned with creativity and innovation, such imaginative flexibility is valuable.

9. Coleridge: Imagination, Complexity and Reflective Learning

If Shelley helps students imagine beyond immediate limitations, Coleridge can help them understand why imaginative interpretation is rarely simple. His distinction between fancy and imagination remains pedagogically useful because it differentiates mechanical combination from a deeper power of synthesis. In Chapter XIV of *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge describes imagination through the language of unity and reconciliation, including the reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities.

This conception offers a powerful model for interpretive learning. Students often expect literary questions to have one correct answer. Coleridgean pedagogy can instead teach them to examine tensions without prematurely eliminating them. A poem may be joyful and sad, beautiful and disturbing, personal and universal, natural and supernatural, simple in language and complex in implication. The ability to sustain such tensions is an important form of intellectual maturity.

"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is especially suitable for this approach. Students can be asked to identify moments in which the poem produces competing responses: attraction and fear, fascination and moral unease, punishment and transformation, isolation and renewed relation. Instead of resolving these oppositions immediately, learners can construct an interpretive map showing how one tension changes another.

"Kubla Khan" can likewise be used to discuss imagination, fragmentariness, dream, creativity, and the limits of interpretation. A classroom should resist the temptation to supply a single final explanation of the poem. The uncertainty itself can become an educational resource. Students can compare interpretations and identify the textual details on which each interpretation depends.

"Frost at Midnight" provides another route into reflective learning. The poem connects memory, solitude, education, nature, parenthood, and hopes for a child's future. Students can explore how the poem moves between present perception and remembered experience. Such analysis encourages them to see that a poem's meaning can develop through shifts in time and consciousness.

Coleridge's educational significance, then, lies in complexity. He offers a model for a classroom in which interpretation is not an act of guessing the teacher's answer but a disciplined process of bringing different elements into relation. Students can be asked not only what they think a poem means, but what

evidence makes an interpretation plausible, what remains unresolved, and what alternative reading could account for the same evidence.

10. Frost: Reality, Metaphor and Critical Thinking

Robert Frost is frequently introduced through themes such as nature, rural life, choice, isolation, and simplicity. Such labels can be useful starting points, but they can also make his poetry appear easier than it is. Frost's ordinary settings often conceal intellectual instability. His poems invite readers to reconsider assumptions about boundaries, decisions, relationships, work, desire, and responsibility.

"Mending Wall" is a particularly effective classroom text because its central situation is concrete. Two neighbours meet to repair a boundary. Yet the poem gradually turns a physical wall into a question about habit, property, privacy, social tradition, and human separation. Students can first describe the literal activity and then identify the different meanings attached to the wall. The teacher can ask whether a boundary is always restrictive, whether boundaries can also create security, and why people maintain traditions they cannot fully explain. Such questions develop evidence-based interpretation without dictating a single conclusion.

"The Road Not Taken" offers another opportunity to complicate familiar readings. The poem is often reduced to a motivational message about choosing an individual path. A closer reading reveals ambiguity concerning memory, self-narration, and the way people construct meaning around past choices. In a contemporary classroom, students can examine the difference between making a choice and later telling a story about that choice. This distinction is especially valuable in an age of personal branding and curated identity.

"Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" can be approached through attention to competing impulses: attraction to stillness and the recognition of obligations. Rather than converting the poem into a single moral lesson, students can identify how sound, repetition, setting, and the final movement of the poem produce tension.

Frost's prose on poetry strengthens this pedagogical possibility. His account of metaphor in "Education by Poetry" treats metaphor not merely as a decorative figure but as a way of making connections and thinking. This is highly relevant to contemporary literacy because students constantly interpret metaphors in public discourse, advertising, political language, social media, and everyday conversation. Teaching metaphor through Frost can therefore connect literary study with critical media literacy.

The educational movement here is from imaginative possibility toward testing. Students are encouraged to ask: What does this image suggest? What evidence supports that suggestion? What happens when the metaphor is extended? Does the poem confirm or disturb the interpretation? In this way, poetry becomes a training ground for disciplined but flexible thought.

11. From Romantic Imagination to Frostian Realism: A Pedagogical Continuum

The central contribution of this article is the proposed continuum:

IMAGINE → INTERPRET → ENGAGE WITH REALITY

The first stage, associated pedagogically with Shelley, invites students to expand the field of possibility. Learners experiment with perspectives, metaphors, relationships, and alternative ways of seeing.

The second stage, associated with Coleridge, asks learners to organise and interrogate those possibilities. They identify tensions, compare interpretations, reconcile apparently conflicting details where possible, and recognise where reconciliation remains incomplete.

The third stage, associated with Frost, asks learners to bring interpretation into contact with experience. They examine ordinary situations, choices, social practices, uncertainty, and consequences. They test abstract ideas against concrete language and situations.

This continuum should not be understood as a chronological ladder in which imagination is immature and realism is mature. Instead, it is recursive. A student may move from reality to metaphor, from metaphor to imagination, from imagination to interpretation, and back to experience. The value of the model lies in movement rather than hierarchy.

A classroom activity can illustrate the model. Suppose students read "Mending Wall." The teacher begins with observation: What is happening literally? Students then imagine different perspectives: What might the wall mean to each neighbour? They interpret the repeated statements and contradictions. Finally, they engage with reality by examining boundaries in their own communities—not by forcing the poem to represent their lives, but by using its tensions to generate questions about social practices.

The same model can be used with Shelley and Coleridge. After reading "Ode to the West Wind," students can imagine transformation, interpret the poem's shifting images, and then ask how real social or personal change occurs. After reading "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," they can imagine the Mariner's

experience, interpret the poem's moral and supernatural ambiguities, and then consider how responsibility, isolation, and restoration function in real human relationships.

12. Poetry and Critical Thinking

Critical thinking in literary education should not be confused with finding faults in a text. It involves questioning assumptions, evaluating evidence, considering alternatives, and revising interpretations. Poetry is particularly suitable for this because poems frequently compress meaning and leave relationships partly implicit.

A useful classroom sequence is:

Encounter: Students read or hear the poem without an immediate lecture.

Notice: Students record words, images, sounds, contradictions, or questions that attract their attention.

Interpret: Students formulate a provisional claim about the poem.

Substantiate: Students locate textual evidence supporting the claim.

Reconsider: Students identify evidence that complicates or challenges the claim.

This sequence changes the teacher's role from supplier of meaning to facilitator of disciplined interpretation. It also changes the student's role from answer-recipient to reader-researcher.

Contemporary research on poetry and critical thinking supports the educational plausibility of this approach, while classroom reflections on poetry teaching have highlighted the importance of modelling the interpretive process aloud. Such modelling can make visible the often-hidden mental operations through which readers move from a first impression to a defensible interpretation.

13. Poetry, Empathy and Emotional Learning

Poetry also offers possibilities for affective learning, although claims about its emotional effects should remain carefully qualified. Shelley's theory provides a particularly strong starting point because he explicitly links imagination with sympathy. A poem can place readers in contact with voices, experiences, and emotional situations beyond their immediate lives.

However, empathy should not be taught as a compulsory emotional response. A responsible poetry classroom allows disagreement and distance. Students may respond differently to the same poem. The educational objective is not to produce identical feelings but to develop the ability to recognise perspectives and articulate responses with evidence and respect.

Coleridge's poetry can support this through its psychological and moral ambiguities. The Ancient Mariner, for instance, is not simply a moral example. His narrative creates questions about guilt, isolation, punishment, memory, and communication. Frost can similarly invite reflection on loneliness, responsibility, uncertainty, and social boundaries.

Poetry therefore becomes a site where emotional response and intellectual analysis meet. Students can be asked not merely "How did the poem make you feel?" but "Which words or images produced that response?" and "Could another reader reasonably respond differently?" Such questions connect affective awareness with textual evidence.

14. Creativity and Student-Centred Learning

The contemporary classroom increasingly values creativity, collaboration, communication, and learner agency. Poetry can support these aims when students are given opportunities to produce interpretations rather than only consume them.

Shelley can inspire imaginative rewriting: students may write from the perspective of the West Wind, a skylark, or another natural force, and then explain what their choices reveal about the original poem. Coleridge can generate interpretive alternatives: students can produce two readings of a poem and identify the textual evidence for each. Frost can support metaphor exercises in which students create metaphors for ordinary objects and then analyse how those metaphors alter perception.

The crucial point is that creative activities should return to analysis. Creative writing without reflection may become an enjoyable but disconnected exercise. After creating a metaphor, students should examine its assumptions. After rewriting a poem from another perspective, they should identify what changed and why. Such reflection converts creativity into metacognition.

Poetry pedagogy research has increasingly explored these connections between creative practice, literacy, metaphorical thinking, and critical thinking. The value of the proposed framework is that it integrates these activities with close reading rather than treating them as separate enrichment tasks.

15. Challenges in Teaching Poetry

A realistic pedagogy must acknowledge obstacles. The first is examination pressure. Teachers may have limited time and may feel compelled to teach predictable answer formats. The proposed model does not require abandoning examination preparation. Instead, close reading and evidence-based interpretation can strengthen students' ability to answer analytical questions.

The second challenge is students' fear of being "wrong." This is partly produced by classroom habits in which a textbook explanation becomes the final authority. Teachers can address this by distinguishing between an unsupported opinion and a defensible interpretation. A student does not have to produce the teacher's answer, but must be able to explain how the poem supports the interpretation.

The third challenge is linguistic difficulty. Older poetry can contain unfamiliar vocabulary, syntax, cultural references, and forms. Simplifying the poem too quickly may deprive students of the experience of working through difficulty. A better approach is scaffolded reading: clarify necessary vocabulary, model one difficult passage, and then allow students to attempt interpretation independently.

The fourth challenge is the danger of overusing contemporary relevance. Not every poem needs to be forced into a modern social issue. Historical difference matters. The goal is not to make Shelley, Coleridge, or Frost sound like contemporary writers. The goal is to allow contemporary readers to encounter their difference and then think through what that difference makes possible.

16. A Practical Pedagogical Model

The proposed model can be organised into five classroom phases:

Phase 1: Encounter

The teacher presents the poem with minimal pre-explanation. Students listen, read silently, or read aloud.

Phase 2: Notice

Students mark striking images, repetitions, contrasts, questions, unusual words, shifts in tone, and moments of uncertainty.

Phase 3: Interpret

Students formulate an initial interpretation. The teacher encourages multiple hypotheses rather than immediately selecting one.

Phase 4: Substantiate

Students support interpretations through specific textual evidence. They compare interpretations in pairs or groups.

Phase 5: Engage

Students connect the poem's problem or tension to a broader intellectual or experiential question. The connection should remain analytical rather than merely personal.

The three poets can be distributed across this model:

Shelley: What can imagination make visible that ordinary perception misses?

Coleridge: How does the poem hold together elements that appear contradictory?

Frost: What happens when an idea meets ordinary experience, uncertainty, or consequence?

Assessment can also change. Instead of assessing only recall, teachers can use short analytical responses, annotation, comparative paragraphs, reflective journals, discussion-based interpretation, and evidence-supported creative tasks. A rubric may consider observation, textual evidence, interpretation, alternative perspectives, and clarity of reasoning.

17. Discussion

The proposed pedagogical continuum demonstrates that the educational value of poetry can extend beyond literary terminology. Shelley helps establish why imaginative capacity matters; Coleridge demonstrates why interpretation requires synthesis and tolerance of complexity; Frost shows how metaphor and ordinary experience can turn reading into a form of practical thinking.

The three poets also challenge simplistic binaries. Shelley is not merely an escapist idealist. His theory of imagination has ethical and social dimensions. Coleridge is not merely a poet of supernaturalism; his theory offers a sophisticated account of how consciousness organises experience. Frost is not merely a simple realist; his ordinary scenes often produce ambiguity and philosophical uncertainty.

These qualifications are essential because pedagogy becomes reductive when literary labels replace reading. A student who learns that Shelley equals "imagination," Coleridge equals "supernaturalism," and Frost equals "realism" has memorised categories but has not necessarily learned how poetry thinks. The proposed framework therefore uses concepts as invitations to inquiry rather than final definitions.

The framework also has relevance to teacher education. Teachers need to model uncertainty responsibly. If the teacher always supplies the final interpretation, students learn dependence. If the teacher presents every interpretation as equally valid, students may learn relativism without evidence. The productive middle ground is interpretive accountability: multiple readings may be possible, but each must engage with the text.

This principle is particularly important in the digital age. Students increasingly encounter information in contexts where speed and confidence can appear more important than verification. Literary interpretation

can cultivate a counter-practice: slow attention, evidence, comparison, uncertainty, and revision. Poetry cannot solve all educational problems, but it can provide a small and powerful environment in which these habits are practised.

18. Pedagogical Implications

The article suggests five broader implications.

First, poetry should be taught as a mode of thinking, not merely a literary product. Frost's emphasis on metaphor is especially useful here.

Second, imagination should not be separated from critical thought. Shelley's imaginative expansion can be followed by Coleridgean examination of complexity and Frostian testing against experience.

Third, affective learning should remain evidence-based and ethically open. Students can explore emotional responses without being required to adopt a prescribed feeling.

Fourth, assessment should reward interpretation supported by textual evidence. This can coexist with examination requirements and may strengthen analytical writing.

Fifth, literary history can be made pedagogically active. Instead of memorising periods, students can compare how different poets construct reality, imagination, language, and human experience.

19. Conclusion

The contemporary classroom needs forms of literary education that preserve the distinctiveness of literature while responding to broader educational aims. Poetry is particularly valuable because it requires concentrated attention to language and because it often refuses the simplicity of a single, immediately available meaning.

The comparative framework developed in this article places Shelley, Coleridge, and Frost in a pedagogical conversation. Shelley foregrounds the expansive and ethical possibilities of imagination; Coleridge deepens that imaginative faculty into a theory of synthesis, complexity, and reconciliation; Frost brings metaphorical thought into contact with ordinary experience, uncertainty, and human situations. From these differences emerges a flexible sequence: Imagine, Interpret, Engage with Reality.

The sequence is not intended as a universal teaching formula. It is a conceptual tool for designing literary experiences in which students can move from first perception to imaginative possibility, from possibility to evidence-based interpretation, and from interpretation to reflective engagement with the world. Such movement can help learners become more attentive readers and more independent thinkers.

The educational purpose of poetry, therefore, need not be reduced to examination success, nor does it need to be defended only through claims about beauty. Poetry can matter because it teaches forms of attention, association, questioning, perspective-taking, and intellectual revision. In a classroom shaped by rapid information and competing interpretations, these capacities are not peripheral to education. They are part of what it means to learn how to read.

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