

Analysis and Teaching Suggestions of Lotus Culture in Elementary School Chinese Textbooks

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Lotus is an important cultural symbol in Chinese context. It represents pureness, nobleness, and transcendental. There are a lot of lotus culture integrated in Chinese elementary school Chinese textbooks such as poems and essays describing the beauty of natural scenery and the value. This paper provides a detailed analysis of the content related to the lotus in elementary school Chinese textbooks, and discusses the problems existing in teaching, and then proposes corresponding countermeasures.

Keywords: lotus culture, Chinese curriculum, culture integration

Introduction

Lotus is an important cultural symbols in Chinese culture and daily life of ordinary people. There are a lot of Chinese poems and proses describing the property and beauty as well as the spirit of lotus. It plays an important role in pupils' humanistic literacy education. This article analyzes in detail of the lotus content in elementary school Chinese textbooks, explores the main problems existing in teaching, and puts forward some corresponding countermeasures.

Texts as poems and essays related to lotus vividly depict the beauty and nobleness of lotus. These texts can develop students' morality and aesthetics, pursuit of the purity, elegance and the spirit of perseverance. But teachers cannot make a good use of such kind of texts to promote the students' cultural awareness and critical thinking. Through the text analysis and teaching observation, some problems can be revealed and improvement can be made.

Analysis of Lotus Culture in Elementary School Chinese Teaching Materials

There are a lot of Chinese poems and proses related to lotus culture in elementary school Chinese teaching materials (ESCTM). Here are topics in different categories.

“Jiangnan”

“Jiangnan” is a song of lotus-picking in the water towns of Jiangnan, from “Han Yuefu-Xianghe Geci”: In Jiangnan, lotus can be picked; how lush are the lotus leaves. The fish plays among the lotus leaves. The fish plays to the east of the lotus leaves, the fish plays to the west of the lotus leaves, the fish plays to the south of the lotus leaves, and the fish plays to the north of the lotus leaves.

Acknowledgement: The achievement of the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Project for College Students in 2024 (Code: X202410452099). Other members: Liu Xinyue, Zhang Shuai.

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Table 1

Lotus Topics in Different Categories in ESCTM

Grade	Text	Grade	Text
Volume 1, Grade 1	Jiangnan	Volume 2, Grade 1	Round lotus leaves
Volume 1, Grade 1	A child on the pond	Volume 2, Grade 3	Lotus
Volume 1, Grade 1	The little pond	Volume 1, Grade 6	Willow and Water Lotus

It is exactly the season of lotus-picking in Jiangnan. The green lotus leaves stand upright in the water, close together and in layers, how flourishing! The fish plays among the lotus leaves. They swim to the east for a while, to the west for a while, to the south for a while, and to the north for a while.

The poem depicts the states of the lotus leaves and the fish through simple and lively language and a repetitive melody, showing the happy mood of the people when picking lotus, praising the beautiful scenery of the water towns in Jiangnan, and expressing the author's love for nature.

As a folk song of the Han Dynasty, Jiangnan has very distinct folk song characteristics. The language is simple, natural, and full of lively and lovely flavor of life, attracting readers' interest in reading; it is simple, lively, and rich in musical sense, and easy to read aloud. At the same time, the poem also has a beautiful artistic conception. The sentence "How lush are the lotus leaves" not only vividly writes about the lushness, brightness, and delicacy of the lotus leaves in detail, but also makes people think of the green waves surging and rising when the breeze blows behind the lotus leaves, making people feel the quiet and beautiful artistic conception of the water towns in Jiangnan. Finally, it is the dynamic description of the poem. "The fish plays among the lotus leaves" makes the whole picture full of vitality and energy by describing the fish freely shuttling among the lotus leaves. At the same time, the use of the four directional words "east", "west", "south", and "north" shows the state of the fish freely shuttling and unrestrained among the lotus leaves, and also increases the rhythm and musical beauty of the poem.

"Jiangnan" is a bright pearl in ancient Chinese poetry. It not only shows the beautiful scenery of the water towns in Jiangnan and the happy life of the lotus-pickers, but also conveys people's yearning and pursuit for a beautiful life.

"A child on the pond"

"A child on the pond" is a five-character quatrain created by Bai Juyi, a poet of the Tang Dynasty: A little child poles a small boat and steals white lotuses back. Not knowing how to conceal his tracks, a trail is left among the floating duckweeds.

A little child poles a small boat and secretly picks white lotuses from the pond and comes back. He does not know how to hide his tracks. As the small boat rows across the water surface, it leaves a trace where the floating duckweeds are parted.

This poem depicts a scene of a child stealing white lotuses. Through vivid detailed descriptions, it shows the child's naivety and liveliness. The child in the poem does not know how to conceal his tracks, and as a result, leaves an obvious water trail, which adds interest and charm to the poem.

With easy-to-understand language, Bai Juyi depicts a picture of children full of the flavor of life, making readers feel as if they are in that lotus pond, experiencing the pure happiness of children and the carefree childhood time. The whole poem is full of childish fun and the beauty of nature, making people unable to help smiling after reading it and also leaving them with an endless aftertaste.

“The Little Pond”

“The Little Pond” is a fresh and delicate poem created by Yang Wanli, a poet of the Song Dynasty: The spring eye silently cherishes the trickling stream, the tree shade shines on the water, loving the gentle sunshine. The little lotus has just revealed its pointed tip, and a dragonfly has already alighted on it.

The thin spring water slowly and quietly flows out from the spring eye, as if the spring eye cherishes it very much and is reluctant to let it flow out more. The shadow of the tree is reflected on the water surface, seemingly loving the gentle scenery on a sunny day. The tender lotus leaf has just emerged from the water with a pointed corner, and a dragonfly has already landed on it.

“The spring silently cherishes the trickling stream, the tree shade shines on the water, loving the gentle sunshine”. The poet uses the rhetorical device of personification, endowing lifeless natural scenery with human emotions and behaviors. The application of this personification device enhances the vividness and imagery of the poem and also makes readers deeply feel the tranquility and harmony of the pond in early summer.

“The little lotus has just revealed its pointed tip, and a dragonfly has already alighted on it”. The skillful and detailed description shows the vibrant scene when the little lotus just emerges from the water and the vivid picture of the dragonfly on the little lotus. These two lines capture the fleeting scenery, making the whole picture more layered and full of dynamism.

The whole poem is small and exquisite, showing a color-ink painting of flowers, plants, insects, and birds, full of poetic and artistic conception. Through agile and skillful means, the poet depicts a natural scene full of interest, writing about the extremely ordinary and tiny things in nature in an affectionate, harmonious, lively, natural, smooth, witty, and clear manner.

“The Small Pond” successfully depicts a fresh and natural scene of a pond in early summer with its unique artistic device and rich emotional expression, showing the poet’s love for nature.

“The Round Lotus Leaf”

“The Round Lotus Leaf” is a prose poem by Hu Muren: The lotus leaf is round and green. The little water droplet says, “The lotus leaf is my cradle”. The little water droplet lies on the lotus leaf, blinking its shiny eyes. The little dragonfly says, “The lotus leaf is my landing pad”. The little dragonfly stands on the lotus leaf, spreading its transparent wings. The little frog says, “The lotus leaf is my singing stage”. The little frog squats on the lotus leaf, croaking and singing aloud. The little fish says, “The lotus leaf is my parasol”. The little fish swims around merrily under the lotus leaf, scooping up one beautiful water flower after another.

“The Round Lotus Leaf” depicts the vibrant scene of a lotus pond in summer through lively language, full of childish fun and poetic flavor. The work uses four little friends—the little water droplet, the little dragonfly, the little frog, and the little fish, and uses the personification device to endow them with lively lives and emotions, establishing an intimate relationship between them and the lotus leaf. These vivid descriptions not only conform to the age characteristics of students and attract their learning interests, but also cleverly reveal the morphological and functional characteristics of the lotus leaf.

Through this prose poem, we can feel the author’s love and praise for nature, as well as his reverence and care for life. At the same time, the work also reminds us to cherish nature and protect the environment, so that the beautiful natural scenery will always remain in our hearts.

“Lotus”

“Lotus” is a prose written by the famous writer Ye Shengtao, from “The Special Collection of Ye Shengtao: Lotus”. It is a prose that describes the beautiful scene of a pool of lotus in full bloom in a summer park.

At the beginning of the article, the fragrance is smelled before the form is seen. The alluring fragrance attracts the readers’ attention and leads them into a world filled with the aroma of lotus. Immediately after, the author uses simile and personification, meticulously describing the shape of the lotus leaves (“packed closely together, like large green discs”) and the different blooming stages of the lotus (“some have only unfolded two or three petals”, “some have all their petals unfolded”, “some are still flower buds”). It makes the readers feel as if they are in the lotus pool and experience the freshness and elegance of the lotus. While depicting the real scene, the author also incorporates his own imagination. For example, he imagines himself as a lotus, dancing with the lotus. This combination of the real and the imaginary makes the article more vivid and interesting and better expresses the author’s love for the lotus.

“Lotus” not only demonstrates Mr. Ye Shengtao’s exquisite language art and profound thoughts and feelings but also makes an important contribution to modern Chinese literature. Through the study and appreciation of this work, people can more deeply understand the harmonious unity of natural beauty and artistic beauty and the ability to seek and create beauty in ordinary life.

“The Willow and the Water Lily”

“The Willow and the Water Lily” is a prose poem written by the famous Chinese aesthetician Zong Baihua. It unfolds through the dialogue between the willow and the water lily. Through the dialogue between the willow in the morning breeze and the water lily under the waning moon, it reveals a profound philosophical truth about life. Although the water lily has experienced the fear of the night and the dampness of the mud, it is not despairing but regards its tears as the fear of last night and the joy of today. This attitude reflects the spirit of maintaining hope and gratitude in adversity.

The work is presented in the form of a dialogue, making the language vivid and full of implication and artistic tension. The elegant appearance of the willow symbolizes sobriety and guidance, while the water lily represents a calm and composed attitude towards life in adversity. At the end of the article, the water lily still stands gracefully in the darkness, showing its courage and tenacity to transcend the environment. The work also uses techniques such as contrast and personification to make the characteristics of the willow and the water lily more distinct. The beginning part introduces the theme through the contrast between the two, and the end expresses the unique perception of life through their mutual dependence. Key words such “clinging” and “leaning” further emphasize the theme of the article, that is, there is both mutual dependence and competitive opposition in life.

“The Willow and the Water Lily” is not only a work full of philosophy and literature but also conveys the longing for love and beauty through natural scenery, inspiring readers’ love and yearning for traditional culture.

Problems in Teaching

Through classroom teaching observation and interviews of teachers, problems are found as follows:

The Ignorance of Cultural Awareness

Teachers usually ask the students to watch the video and read the text emotionally, and then analyze the text word by word, sentence by sentence and analyze the rhetorical device. These can help students understand the meaning of the text and arouse the beauty awareness. But teachers seldom disclose the cultural represents of lotus

theme in Chinese cultural context. They tell the students lotus represents purity and nobleness but no “why” from the perspectives of culture.

Lack of Real Experience in Daily Life and Practice

Students know lotus from pictures, songs, travels, and hometown lotus ponds. But they seldom have the real experience of the purity and nobleness of lotus in reality. Teachers cannot use situational teaching or stories to arouse the students’ emotion and critical thinking of lotus culture awareness. Students mainly focus on the images or rhythms of the text, not the deep meaning and emotion, attitude and cultural awareness in the background of the authors and historical context.

Unable to Integrate Interdisciplinary Knowledge in Lotus Topics Teaching

Lotus topics can be taught in various perspectives such as the literary, biological, drawing, and medicine, etc. The students cannot construct a stereoscopic scenery in mind with the lotus theme. This is not beneficial to the competency development of problem solving in reality.

The Integration of VR/VA Teaching Is Insufficient

Most teachers can use video for teaching, but seldom integrate VR/VA in teaching such kind of topics. Students lack the authentic experience by interaction with the authors in the past and the people in reality.

Suggestions

The theme of lotus belongs to the broad category of human and nature in the elementary school Chinese curriculum standards. Based on the above text analysis, the stylistic styles include poetry, prose poetry, and prose. For the teaching of such genres, the aesthetic sense should be the first concern. The core literacy part of the *Compulsory Education Chinese Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)* requires: Students should gain relatively rich aesthetic experiences through feeling, understanding, appreciating, and evaluating language and works, have the initial ability to perceive beauty, discover beauty, express beauty, and create beauty with language; cultivate elegant tastes and possess healthy aesthetic awareness and correct aesthetic concepts (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2022).

In the long history of Chinese literature, lotus has become a synonym for the gentleman among flowers. People praise the characteristics of lotus that “it emerges unstained from the mud and is not coquettish in the clear ripples”, and appreciate its noble quality. Through the analysis and interpretation of the “lotus” image, summarization can enable students to experience Chinese culture and continuously improve their reading literacy and aesthetic ability. There are abundant theoretical research results on the “flower” image in the literary field. Chinese teaching needs to find effective methods to combine literary interpretation with classroom teaching, so as to better guide students to understand the “lotus” image in literary works. The following are some specific methods and strategies:

Fully Display the Natural Beauty of Lotus

The lotus is an aquatic nymph poised in stately grace. In the embrace of nature, the lotus is a paragon of beauty: Its stem, erect and slender, supports blossoms with petals arrayed in dainty tiers, buds plump and full, and a color palette of soft, understated hues. The broad leaves provide a verdant backdrop to the flowers that rise above, like a celestial maiden from the Jade Pool of paradise, exuding an air of refined elegance and alluring charm (Liu, 2008). Whether it is the petals as white as snow or the stamens as pink as rosy clouds, they both offer

people the enjoyment of beauty. Such natural beauty enables people to sense the miraculous charm of nature and guides them to learn to appreciate the wonderful things around.

In elementary school Chinese textbooks, there are numerous texts depicting the natural beauty of the lotus. For example, in the text “Lotus”, it describes the lotus like this: The lotus has bright colors, mostly pink or white, forming a sharp contrast with the green lotus leaves and presenting the beauty of colors in nature. Meanwhile, through detailed descriptions, the text shows various postures of the lotus from budding to full bloom, such as “Some have only unfolded two or three petals, some have all their petals unfolded, revealing the small yellowish-green lotus pods, and some are still flower buds, looking as if they are about to burst with fullness”. These descriptions make people seem to witness the numerous postures of the lotus in person. The lotus emerges from the densely packed lotus leaves, and the reason why the word “emerges” is vivid is that it portrays the unique liveliness, naivety, and vitality of children. There is a kind of lively playfulness full of vitality in this “dynamism” (Liu, 2020).

In “The Round Lotus Leaf”, it begins with “The lotus leaf is round and green”, depicting the shape and color of the lotus leaf and giving people a fresh and comfortable visual experience. From the perspectives of the small animals, the lotus leaf is endowed with multiple roles, such as the cradle of the little water droplet, the landing pad of the little dragonfly, the singing stage of the little frog, and the parasol of the little fish. These vivid descriptions not only show the practicality and beauty of the lotus leaf but also present a beautiful picture of the harmonious coexistence between animals and plants in nature. The text shows the natural beauty of the lotus and the lotus leaf through detailed descriptions and vivid metaphors, allowing students to feel the magic and wonder of nature among the words and cultivating their healthy aesthetic taste.

From the perspective of thinking development, in the elementary school stage, there is a sequential progression from intuitive thinking to visual thinking and then to abstract thinking. In terms of grade levels, the third grade is a stable period of visual thinking. Students’ observation ability, picture-reading ability, and thinking ability are becoming more and more mature, and it is just the right time to arouse their interest through picture appreciation (Meng, 2021).

At the beginning of classroom teaching, the teacher can use multimedia to display various artworks, pictures, videos related to lotus or play music related to lotus to create a relaxed and pleasant learning atmosphere and fully display the natural beauty of lotus (Guo, 2005).

For example, display pictures of lotus in different seasons and with different postures to let students preliminarily understand the morphological characteristics of lotus, thus stimulating students’ interest in learning the natural beauty of lotus.

Appropriately Incorporate Cultural Connotations

The lotus has special religious implications in Indian Buddhism. The seat of the Buddha is also known as the “Lotus Throne”, and the Buddhist realm can be called the “Lotus World”. After Buddhism was introduced into China in the late Eastern Han Dynasty and developed through the Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties, Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties, it became popular among literati and officials. Literati and officials influenced by Buddhism were everywhere. Buddhism regards the lotus as its own symbol flower, implying the highest level of “purity”. For example, the lotus has four virtues: fragrance, purity, softness, and loveliness, analogous to the four virtues of the True Suchness, namely permanence, bliss, self, and purity. It emphasizes that it is not stained because it does not adhere to the mud, and even if it is in the mud, it remains unstained (Liu, 2008). The lotus is

not merely a plant, but also a cultural symbol. In traditional Chinese culture, the lotus represents purity, elegance, and the spirit of perseverance. In elementary school Chinese textbooks, many texts convey these profound cultural connotations by telling stories or legends related to the lotus, inspiring students to think about life, growth, and the value of life. In “Lotus”, the blooming of the lotus is a highlight of the text. The delicate and charming flowers bring people the enjoyment of beauty. This beauty lies not only on the surface but also in the strong inner vitality shown by the lotus.

In “The Round Lotus Leaf”, the lotus and other aquatic organisms together form a harmonious ecological environment. The lotus is not alone. It is interdependent and mutually influential with the surrounding organisms. This symbiotic relationship symbolizes the cooperative spirit that people should have in society. People should get along harmoniously with others like the lotus and jointly create a beautiful environment.

The lotus grows in the mud but can maintain its own purity, “emerging unstained from the mud and remaining untainted in the clear ripples”. This symbolizes that in a complex social environment, people should adhere to their own principles, maintain inner purity and nobility, and not be eroded by external filth. The lotus grows out of the mud and, after experiencing the baptism of wind and rain, can still bloom beautiful flowers. This enlightens us that when facing difficulties and challenges in life, we should maintain the spirit of perseverance, move forward bravely, and finally welcome our own glorious moment.

In the lecture part of classroom teaching, the teacher can explain in detail the morphological characteristics of the lotus, such as petals, stamens, lotus leaves, etc., as well as the growth environment of the lotus, such as water, lotus leaves, stems, etc. With the help of pictures and real objects, it helps students understand and remember better. At the same time, the teacher can also explain the symbolic meaning of the lotus. In Chinese culture, the lotus often symbolizes purity and elegance. This cultural connotation can deepen students’ understanding of the beauty of the lotus. In addition, by comparing lotus works by different painters, students are guided to appreciate different styles of artistic expression.

Use Multiple Teaching Methods

The discourses on the theme of lotus in elementary school Chinese can serve as carriers for innovating teaching methods. Teachers can use AI to generate images of lotuses and combine virtual reality technology to let students immerse themselves in experiencing the beauty of lotuses and enhance the intuitiveness and interest of teaching. Teachers can also organize activities such as lotus-themed poetry recitation meetings, painting competitions, and handicraft making for students, allowing students to feel the charm of lotuses in practice and improve their participation in learning.

Conduct thematic lectures: Invite horticulturists to the school to give special lectures and explain in depth the planting techniques and growth habits of lotuses. At the beginning of art classroom teaching, teachers can display various artworks, pictures, and videos related to lotuses through multimedia or play music related to lotuses to create a relaxed and pleasant learning atmosphere.

Integrate handicraft making and artistic creation in teaching: Teachers encourage students to create poems with the theme of lotuses, and organize painting and calligraphy competitions, enabling students to express their perceptions and imaginations of the beauty of lotuses in artistic creation; guide students to use recyclable materials such as paper and cloth to make lotus models or related handicrafts, so that students can understand the importance of environmental protection while exercising their hands-on abilities.

Conduct popular science knowledge competitions: Design popular science knowledge competitions about lotuses, covering multiple fields such as biology, literature, and history. Students discuss and answer in groups. When answering questions, teachers can choose simple scientific experiments for demonstration, such as observing the phenomenon of water droplets rolling on lotus leaves and explaining the physical principles therein. These activities can not only enrich students' after-school lives but also stimulate their learning interests.

Create more practical activities: An important goal for elementary school students in learning themes related to nature is to love and protect nature, establish ecological awareness, combine what they have learned with actions, truly internalize it in their hearts, be emotionally touched, and be guided to act.

The discourses on the theme of lotus show unique value in terms of ecological protection. Elementary school students can bring what they have learned to their families and neighborhoods to help them better recognize the value of lotuses.

Lotuses play an important role in improving water quality. Their developed root systems can absorb nutrients and harmful substances in water, such as nitrogen and phosphorus, effectively reducing the risk of eutrophication of water bodies. Meanwhile, the microbial communities on the leaves can effectively degrade organic pollutants, improve the transparency of water bodies, and provide a good habitat for aquatic organisms. The broad leaves and dense root systems provide shelters and food sources for fish, insects, and so on, promoting the maintenance of aquatic biodiversity. The discourses on the theme of lotus in elementary school Chinese vividly describe the beautiful picture of the harmonious coexistence between lotuses and aquatic organisms. Through the study of the texts, students become more aware of the crucial role of lotuses in maintaining the water ecological balance.

The discourses on the theme of lotus also have important value in ecological tourism and environmental protection education. Many places rely on lotus resources to hold flower-viewing activities, which not only drive the local economic development but also raise the public's environmental protection awareness and arouse people's respect and love for nature. While analyzing teaching materials, teachers should educate students to cherish and protect lotus resources and contribute their own share to building a beautiful China.

The discourses on the theme of lotus are good carriers of aesthetic education. They depict the graceful postures and fresh and elegant temperament of lotuses with delicate strokes. They are not only beautifully and vividly written but also rich in emotional colors. While guiding students to appreciate the beauty of nature, teachers can also cultivate students' literary appreciation abilities. In real life, lotuses are symbols of such fine qualities as purity, elegance, and perseverance. Through their infiltration in teaching materials, they can subtly influence students' minds and prompt them to form correct values.

The discourses on the theme of lotus in elementary school Chinese enrich the content of Chinese teaching, provide students with more diversified learning experiences, enable students to improve their comprehensive qualities and deepen their sense of identity and pride in Chinese culture at the same time, and contribute to cultural inheritance and innovation. Teachers should let more students understand and appreciate the beauty of lotuses and feel the broad and profound nature of Chinese culture through various forms of teaching activities and promotion measures.

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