

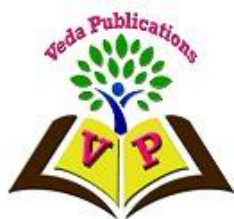
## TRADITIONAL AND MODERN TECHNIQUES FOR A PRACTICAL INTEGRATION OF CREATIVITY WITH EXISTING PEDAGOGY

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[doi: https://doi.org/10.33329/IJREP.2019.11](https://doi.org/10.33329/IJREP.2019.11)

### ABSTRACT



At the risk of stating the obvious, literature is made up of nothing but words. “Words, words, words,” as Hamlet declared. However, teaching literature need not be confined to words alone. Visual aids create an engaging atmosphere for learners and enhance understanding and retention of concepts.

In this age of instant information packaged in byte-sized forwards, facilitating the reading of heavy literature can be a challenge. While technology is generally perceived as a mammoth distraction causing fragmented and incoherent processing of data, it can be streamlined into a fantastic learning aid.

My classroom techniques include a judicious use of technology, combined with a revival of pen-on-paper methods using colours and maps that enhance student participation and create visual stimulation.

In this paper, I attempt to showcase some of the techniques I have successfully used in the classroom to (a) facilitate effective understanding of the subject (b) achieve high retention of concepts (c) eliminate boredom (d) encourage students to think differently.

**Keywords:** *Creativity, Visual aids, Colours, Maps, Practical use, Effectiveness*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The role of creativity in learning has been widely acknowledged by educators and learners alike. In the words of Sir Ken Robinson, "Creativity is as important now as literacy, and we should treat it with the same status." (Robinson). This paper focuses on the role of educators in adopting simple but unorthodox methods of bringing creativity into teaching practices, while adhering to existing pedagogy, keeping in mind the practical needs of the course. While the main idea behind this exercise is to make learning more effective for the students, particularly through the use of visual aids, it is also a way to encourage students to explore different ways of learning. Simple out-of-the box methods can trigger something phenomenal, and as teachers of literature we strive to inculcate unconventional thinking. Creativity, by its very definition, must have no limits.

## **VISUAL COMMUNICATION**

Visual Communication is a very broadly defined term. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, it is "any system of signaling in which the signals are received by the eye." (Merriam-Webster). This can encompass communication methods as diverse as symbols, images, animation, films, maps, body language, pictograms, colours, and even pyrotechnics. Visual communication can be an effective supplement to regular classroom teaching which is primarily reliant on verbal communication. Visual aids have a more successful impact because they are not hampered by barriers of language, culture, geography and attention spans. A graphic, for instance, can communicate a complex idea in an instant, while simultaneously helping us organize our thoughts while teaching, and that of students while learning.

## **COLOURS AND MAPS**

The combination of colours and maps instantly brings to mind the colour coding used in urban public transport systems worldwide such as the Bengaluru Metro or the London Underground. With a colour designated for every line, commuters find it easy to plan their route, change lines, and catch the right train. The eye can easily follow a track from one end to the other without getting lost in the

jumble of station names. Moreover, a newcomer to the city can travel independently with minimum effort.

This paper explores the different ways in which Colours and Maps can be used while teaching literature in higher education. Students can sometimes feel as if they are hit by a deluge of words, and colours can simplify complex and verbose themes. According to Lamberski and Dwyer, whose research suggests that humans involuntarily process colours into codes:

The environment in which we live is visual and colorful. Consequently, most visualization used for instructional purposes is now in color. Since the human organism possesses a limited capacity for assimilating and processing information, it is constantly selecting and rejecting--both consciously and unconsciously--incoming visual stimuli for subsequent retention. Thus, how color is used in instructional and testing materials is an important stimulus variable, especially if we want learners to perceive and interact with the critical content in the instructional visualization. (Lamberski and Dwyer)

Further, colour has been known to play an important part in memory retention, functioning as a powerful information channel to the human cognitive system. (Dzulkifli and Mustafar) Cognitive skills play a key role in a student's academic performance. This makes colour an important tool for teachers and students in an educational setting.

In the context of teaching literature, maps and graphics can be very effectively used to communicate concepts such as hierarchy, interconnections, timelines and relationships pictorially. Literature is full of complicated characters and their dynamics that cannot be succinctly summed up in a sentence. However, one graphic, to paraphrase an old homily, is more effective than a thousand words.

Presented below are three case studies that showcase my usage of colour and maps in classroom teaching at both post-graduate and undergraduate levels.

**CASE STUDY 1 – THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA:  
TRACKING THEMES AND MOTIFS WITH COLOURS**

*The Old Man and The Sea*, a novella by Ernest Hemingway, is rich in imagery and symbolism. Students can get bogged down while keeping track of the story with respect to themes. This is when the classroom can be brightened up with colours. No equipment other than a set of colour pencils is necessary. Students are asked to assign a colour for every theme in the story, and write down the name

of that theme in the chosen colour. In the example below we have chosen **BROWN** for **Man and Nature**, **GREEN** for **Friendship**, **YELLOW** for **Luck**, **RED** for **Isolation**, **ORANGE** for **Pride**, **BLUE** for **Resilience**, and so on. Next, we commence a close reading of the text while simultaneously marking the passages with the colour associated with the theme.

Image 1 below shows how, in the very first page, it is visually apparent that the work is rife with thematic elements.

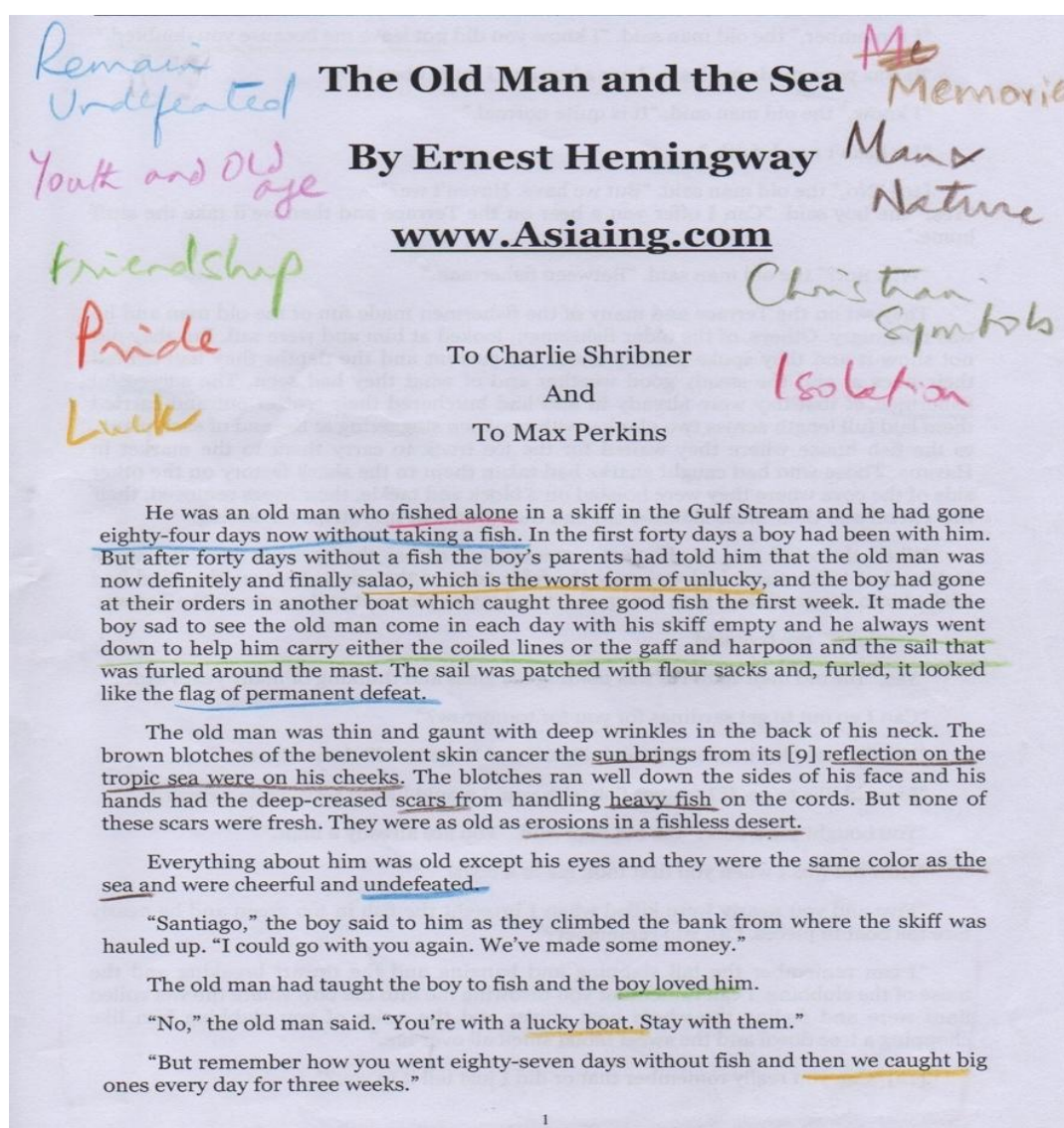
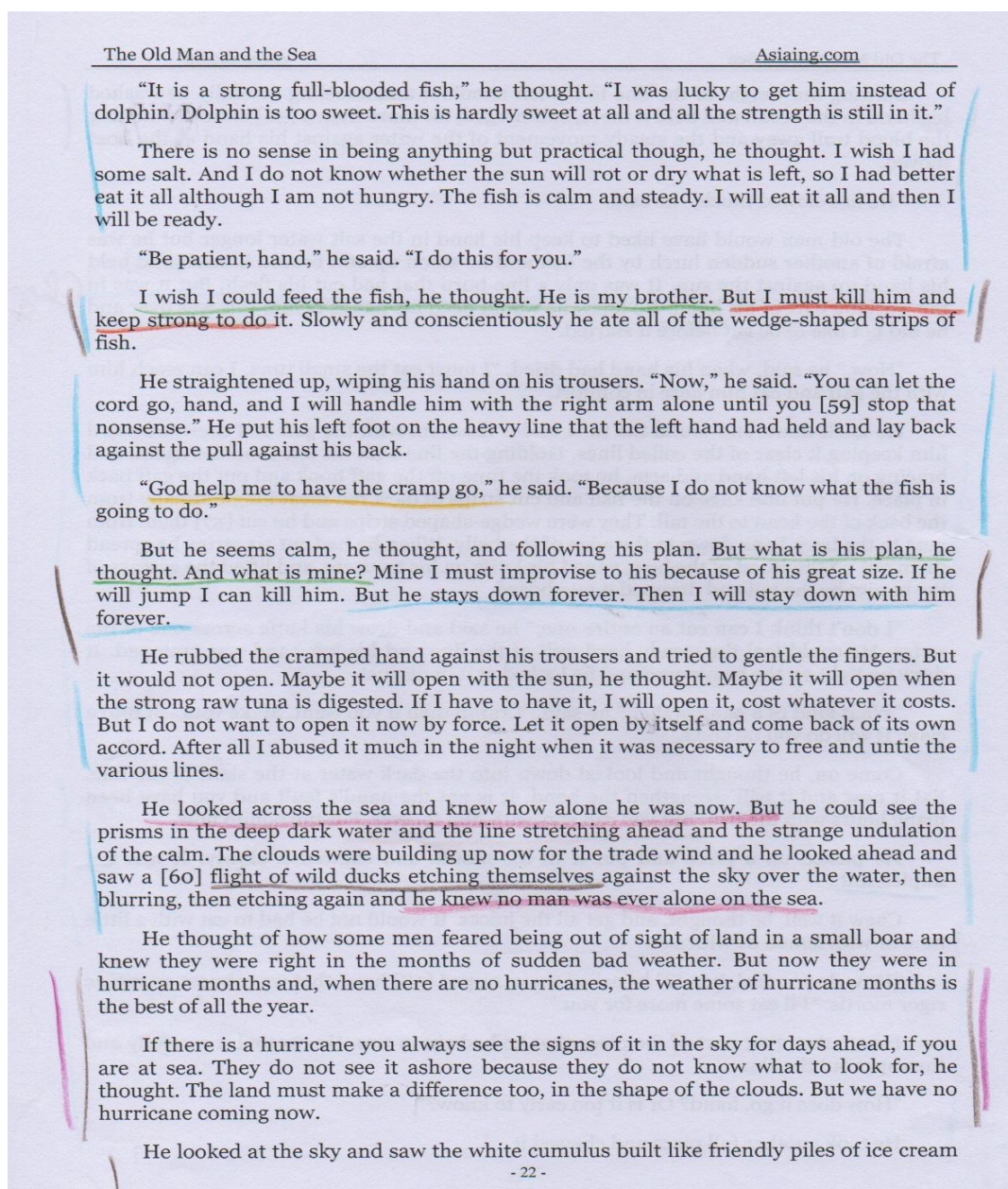


Image 1: Themes colour-tracked in *The Old Man and The Sea* (Hemingway)



Image 2 below shows a different page marked in a similar fashion, with words, phrases or paragraphs underlined with the colour that we have assigned to the theme we identify there. In addition to throwing up all the themes at a glance, multiple themes found layered within a passage can be marked with multiple coloured lines corresponding to each theme in that passage. Depending upon time constraints, a few chapters can be thus colour-tracked in the classroom, and the rest of the book can be left as an exercise for the student. Once the exercise is complete, we will be left with not only a very colourful text, but a fantastic tool that aids in recollection and understanding of themes.

Image 2: Themes colour-tracked in *The Old Man and The Sea*

To use this tool effectively, students are required to go through the text multiple times. During each scan, they must only read the passages marked in a certain colour. For example, in order to follow the motif of **luck**, one need only read the passages marked in **YELLOW**. Next, we will scan the work another time, but focusing only on the passages marked in **BLUE** this time, so that the **resilience** of the Old Man and his strength in **remaining undefeated** clearly stand out. In this manner, we conduct as many readings/scans of the text as there are themes, symbols and motifs.

A strong visual is imprinted in the minds of the students while undertaking colour-tracking of themes. This will be immensely useful during their revisions, and when they are recollecting the essence of the work to frame good answers. Most importantly, students are engaged in an interesting activity that they can extrapolate in various creative ways suited to any kind of analysis in their future careers, limited only perhaps by the number of colours in their pencil boxes!

## CASE STUDY 2 – HOLY THURSDAY: BRINGING OUT CONTRASTS WITH COLOURS

Colours are very useful while analyzing poetry that uses the literary device of juxtapose to send home a hard-hitting message, like William Blake's *Holy Thursday*.

*Holy Thursday* as it appears in *Songs of Experience* is a stark commentary on social injustice and hypocrisy. We use two colours to show how Blake puts contrasting images together to expose the wrongs in society: **ORANGE** for 'happy' or positive emotion, and **PURPLE** for 'sad' or negative emotion. The image below shows how students can, at a glance, absorb how the positioning of words is used by the poet to convey the poignancy of children going hungry in a land of plenty.

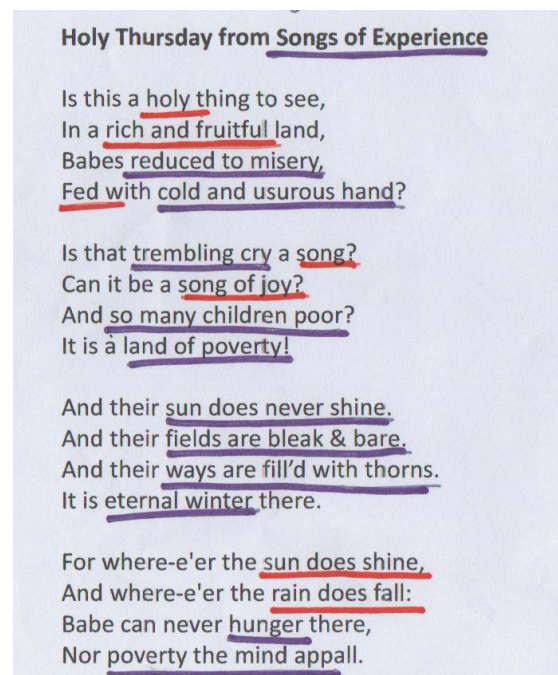


Image 3: Colours to highlight juxtaposition in *Holy Thursday* from *Songs of Experience* (Blake)

In the first two stanzas we see that happy phrases like "holy", "rich and fruitful", "song of joy" are skillfully positioned in proximity with sad phrases like "reduced to misery", "cold and usurous", "trembling cry". The use of colours makes the juxtapose immediately apparent. On the other hand, when we look at the third stanza, we notice that it is entirely purple; it is drenched in pathos. The absence of orange is, for us, a visual indicator of a complete and utter loss of hope.

*Holy Thursday* appears in another avatar in the collection *Songs of Innocence*. A similar exercise has been undertaken to mark the positive and negative emotions in this poem. Presented below is the image with both these poems placed side by side. Just one look tells us that *Holy Thursday* from *Songs of Experience* is predominantly **PURPLE**, while *Holy Thursday* from *Songs of Innocence* is predominantly **ORANGE**, thus visually demonstrating that the former collection is filled with bleakness and the latter takes a rather naive view of the same theme.



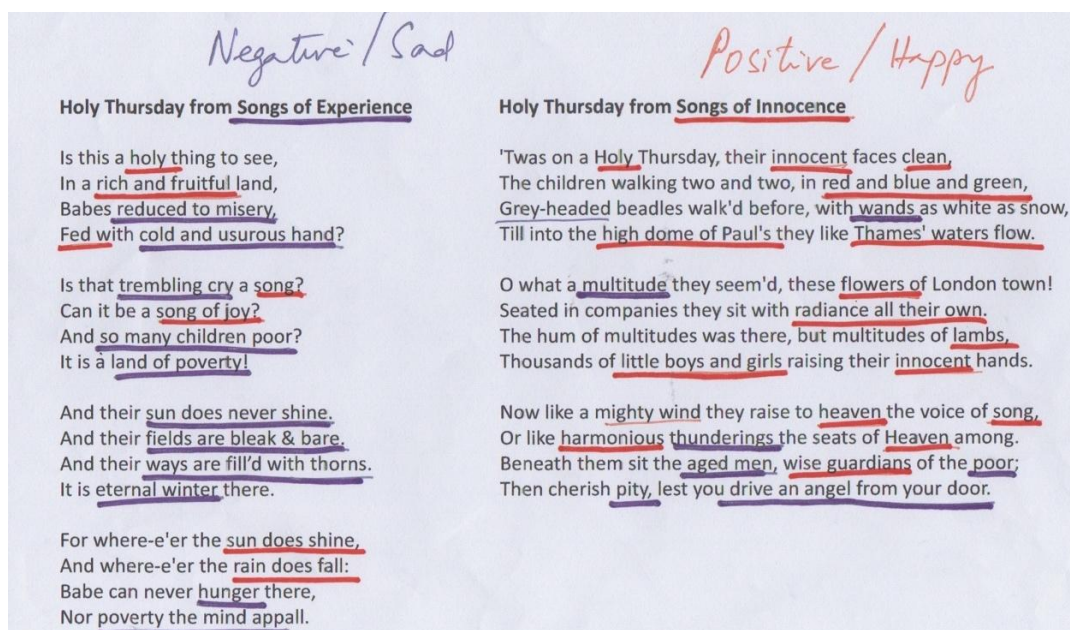


Image 4: Using colours to show the contrast between Blake's Songs of Experience and Songs of Innocence

### THE ROLE OF INTERNET AND SMART PHONES

It is always nice to give a face to a name. The ubiquitous nature of the internet has made it possible for us to source a picture or a likeness of any author and use it to bring in a visual element. Additionally, students can be asked to put together pictures of the author in the backdrop of the history of that time. To continue with the present case study, the students would get a good understanding of the Industrial Revolution and the factors that made William Blake pen such poignant poems on the darker side of modernity and development. There is no limit to the number of ways student may choose to bring out this contrast of prosperity and poverty through visuals and colours. This ensures that students use the Internet and their Smart Phones in a focused way and make the most of technology. Further, being involved in creating material related to the literature will cement the background and facilitate high retention of the information.

### CASE STUDY 3 – SULA: MAPPING THE CHARACTERS TO THE MAIN STORYLINE

A novel such as *Sula*, by Toni Morrison, with its complex characters with even more complex relationships can confuse and befuddle students. To deal with this, a graphic with linear and convoluted lines can be constructed, similar to a mind-map, but

executed creatively to meet the needs of a specific piece of literature. The image below shows a combination of family tree and mind-map to depict (1) The lineage of the main characters Sula and Nel (2) The various people in their lives and how the relationships overlap.

That the novel is centered on strong female characters is shown in the two family trees, while the bubbles containing names of men are just attached on the side, indicating that the men in this novel are only incidental. Eva's Boy Boy is long gone and forgotten, and so is Helene's Wiley Wright. The exceptions are Shadrack and, to a certain extent, Chicken Little, both of whom are not directly connected to any of the main female characters in the novel, but remain in the centre of things. And then there is Jude Green, who is directly connected to both Sula and Nel, making this *connection*, if not the character, pivotal. Eva's two other children, Plum and Pearl, are shown in the graphic but on the periphery, and the other children she took in, Tar Baby and The Deweys, are also shown on Eva's side of the picture. Thus, at a glance, students get the gist of the interplay of characters in this complex study.

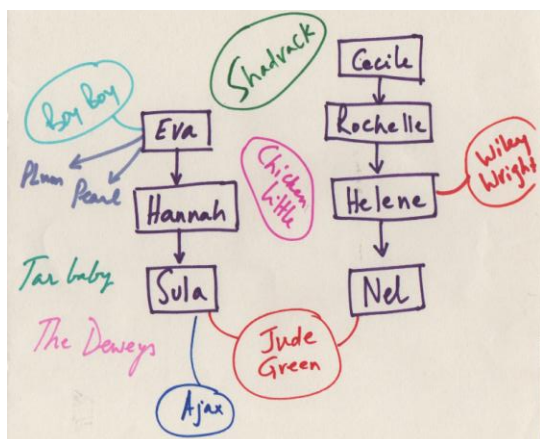


Image 5: Tracking characters' lineage and relationships in Sula(Morrison)

### THE ROLE OF INTERNET AND SMART PHONES

Something as complicated as African-American history (with the interlinked themes of slavery, racism and women's marginalization within the community) is more effectively communicated if students take an active part in the research. This is where the role of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) becomes invaluable. Needless to say, a general background must be provided by the teacher, from there, students can be encouraged to take their research in the direction they feel is pertinent to the text. The result would be a rich plethora of viewpoints, each one valuable, as it is the product of the student's research and hard work. Multiple objectives are realized with this exercise: (1) Students learn to conduct research online with a high degree of focus (2) Students get the satisfaction of contributing in the classroom (3) Elicits good participation (4) Gives students valuable experience in preparing presentations.

### CONCLUSION

The techniques presented in this paper have been put into practice and the results have been positive, with high student participation and satisfaction. The methods are very simple and can be done with no extra demands on infrastructure. Teachers and instructors only have to put their own understanding in visual form, which brings imagination into play, enhancing the teaching as well as learning experience. These methods can thus be integrated with existing pedagogy to create an atmosphere that fosters creativity.