

From Stories to Self: How Literature Shapes Identity in Students.

As a teacher of English, I have often felt that literature does more than teach language, it subtly shapes the Identity of students. “**A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies,**” wrote George R.R. Martin. In classrooms, I have often seen this become true. Stories indeed help students see the world through a different lens and understand themselves more deeply.

One of the most profound shifts I see is the growth of empathy, I witness this shift every time students move beyond a narrow, ‘**singular identity**’ towards a more inclusive global citizenship. Whether we are discussing the ‘Twin Obligation’ in Nelson Mandela’s autobiography or the ‘**laboured ease**’ in Shirley Toulson’s A Photograph, students learn to label complex emotions they previously could not articulate.

I see the influence of literature more so when students read Shakespeare. In our discussions, students realise that Macbeth’s vaulting ambition is no different from the modern-day obsession with power, or when they find their internal conflicts mirrored in the ‘grey areas’ of a character’s choice. As a teacher, the greatest joy is watching the ‘spark of recognition’ in their eyes. Our students realise that the literary figures are not merely characters, but blueprints of themselves – flawed, brave, sometimes jealous and profoundly human.

What amazes me the most is that students rarely remember every literary device taught in the class, but they remember how a story made them feel. A poem may not change the world overnight, but it can change the way students see the world – and themselves.

Perhaps that is why literature survives every generation. Even after examinations fade from memory, stories remain, quietly shaping human hearts.