** LIFE – Literature for everyone**

**Activity: Lesson plan for the enhancement of the reading competence of students**

**Lesson Plan 1 – Greece**

**Designed by Maria Fourountzoglou in collaboration with Charikleia Roukounaki (October 2020)**

Text from **Report to Greco** by **Nikos Kazantzakis**

**Aims:**

* to acquaint students with a text written by the Greek author Nikos Kazantzakis
* to have students reflect on the feelings and thoughts of students in the past and present regarding education, teachers, teaching methods
* to encourage students to talk about the way teachers and parents may have an impact on the students’ identity

**Duration: 45 minutes for the questions. More time needed if you decide to work on the extension.**

**Addresses** students aged 12-15, or even older

**Notes**:

1. The teacher may wish to assign reading the text beforehand at home, so that every student can read at their own pace.
2. Report to Greco has been translated into many languages so you may be able to find it and work on it in the students’ mother language, thus eliminating difficulties arising from a lower level of English.

**Questions**

**Before reading**

Report to Greco was written by a Cretan author born in 1883 and this abstract refers to his early school years. What do you imagine school was like back then?

**After reading**

1. Which persons are mentioned in this abstract? Note down their names and roles (e.g. “teacher”)
2. How would you describe Nikos’ father?
3. How do you find the way Nikos describes his teachers? What aspects of them does he refer to? Which teacher would you like to meet?
4. What was the headmaster’s “New Pedagogy”? What does “pedagogy” mean to you?
5. Thank God, today, schooling conditions in Greece are not as Nikos Kazantzakis describes them. Why, in your opinion? What must be different?

**Extension**

1. Find information about Nikos Kazantzakis. Is there something that amazes you about his life? What other books has he written?
2. Another book by Nikos Kazantzakis is Zorbas. Find out what it is about. The famous Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis composed a musical piece for the film Zorbas, which is famous worldwide. Find it, listen to it, and perhaps dance to it!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QskFT7AaKH0&ab_channel=ilioskaimple>

1. The title of this book is Report to Greco. *El Greco* was the artistic name of a Cretan painter, Dominikos Theotokopoulos, who spent most of his life in Italy and Spain. Find paintings of El Greco, biographical information, and try to explain why Kazantzakis wanted to *report* to him.

<https://www.el-greco-foundation.org/>

<https://www.wikiart.org/en/el-greco>

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0905329/>

1. Role-play parts of the story!

**Information on the author**

[**https://www.kazantzaki.gr/en/life-and-work**](https://www.kazantzaki.gr/en/life-and-work)

**Abstract taken from**

**Report to Greco by Nikos Kazantzakis**

**Translated by P.A. Bien**

Publisher: Simon & Schuster (September 18, 2012)

ISBN13: 9781476706863

**Original title: Αναφορά στο Γκρέκο (Anafora sto Greco)**

**Written in: first planned 1929, finished 1956**

***5* ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

WITH MY EVER-MAGIC EYE, my buzzing bee- and honey-filled mind, a red woolen cap on my head and sandals with red pompons on my feet, I set out one morning, half delighted, half dismayed. My father held me by the hand; my mother had given me a sprig of basil (I was supposed to gain courage by smelling it) and hung my golden baptismal cross around my neck.

“God’s blessings upon you, and my blessings too,” she murmured, looking at me proudly.

I was like a small sacrificial victim weighted down with ornaments. Within me I felt both pride and fear, but my hand was wedged deeply in my father’s grasp, and I bore myself with manly courage. We marched and marched through the narrow lanes, reached Saint Minas’s, turned, and entered an old building with a wide courtyard. Four great rooms occupied the corners and a dust-covered plane tree the middle. I hesitated, turning coward; my hand had begun to tremble in the large warm palm.

Bending over, my father touched my hair and patted me. I gave a start, for as far as I could remember, this was the first time he had ever caressed me. Lifting my eyes, I glanced at him fearfully. He saw that I was afraid and withdrew his hand.

“You’re going to learn to read and write here so you can become a man,” he said. “Cross yourself.”

The teacher appeared in the doorway. He was holding a long switch and seemed like a savage to me, a savage with huge fangs. I pinned my eyes on the top of his head to see if he had horns. But I was unable to see, because he was wearing a hat.

“This is my son,” my father said.

Untangling my hand from his own, he turned me over to the teacher.

“His bones are mine, his flesh is yours. Don’t feel sorry for him. Thrash him and make a man of him.”

“Don’t worry, Captain Michael,” said the teacher, pointing to his switch. “Right here is the tool which makes men.”

A pile of heads remains fixed in my memory from those elementary school days, a pile of children’s heads glued one to the next like skulls. Most of them must actually have become skulls by now. But remaining in me above and beyond those heads, undying, are my four teachers.

Paterópoulos in the first grade: a little old man, very short, fierce-eyed, with drooping mustache, and the switch constantly in hand. He hunted us down, collected us, then set us out in a row as though we were ducks and he were taking us to market to sell. “The bones are mine, the flesh is yours, Teacher,” every father in- structed him as he turned over his wild goat of a son. “Thrash him, thrash him until he becomes a man.” And he thrashed us pitilessly. All of us, teacher and students alike, awaited the day when these many beatings would turn us into men. When I grew older and philanthropic theories began to mislead my mind, I termed this method barbarous. But when I came to know human nature still better, I blessed, and still bless, Pateropoulos’s holy switch. It was this that taught us that suffering is the greatest guide along the ascent which leads from animal to man.

Títyros—“What-cheese”—reigned over the second grade; reigned, poor fellow, but did not govern. He was pale, with spectacles, starched collar and shirt, pointed down-at-heel patent leather shoes, a huge hairy nose, and slender fingers yellowed from tobacco. His real name wasn’t What-cheese, it was Papadákis. But one day his father, who was the priest in an outlying village, came to town bringing him a large head of cheese as a present. “What cheese is this, Father?” said the son [using the form *tyrós* instead of tyrí, to show off his katharévousa]. A neighbor hap- pened to be at the house. She overheard, spread the word, and the poor teacher was roasted over the coals and given this nickname. What-cheese did not thrash, he entreated. He used to read us *Robinson Crusoe*, explaining each and every word. Then he gazed at us with tenderness and anguish, as though begging us to under- stand. But we were thumbing through the book and gazing ecstatically at the poorly printed pictures of tropical forests, trees with great fat leaves, Robinson in his broad-brimmed straw hat with an expanse of deserted ocean on all sides. Bringing out his tobacco pouch, poor What-cheese would roll a cigarette to smoke during recess, look at us imploringly, and wait.

[…]

In the third grade we had Periander Krasákis. What merciless godfather gave the name of Corinth’s savage tyrant to this sickly runt of a man with his high starched collar to conceal the scrofula on his neck, his skinny grasshopper legs, the little handkerchief always at his mouth so that he could spit, spit, and spit as though breathing his last? This one had a mania for cleanliness. Every day he inspected our hands, ears, nose, teeth, and nails. He did not thrash, did not entreat; he shook his oversized head which was covered with pimples, and shouted at us:

“Beasts! Pigs! If you don’t wash every day with soap, you’ll never, never become men. You know what being a man means? It means washing with soap. Brains aren’t enough, you poor devils, soap is needed too. How are you going to appear before God with hands like that? Go out to the yard and get washed.”

He drove us to distraction for hours on end—which vowels were long, which short, whether to use an acute or circumflex accent-while we listened to the voices in the street—vegetable mongers, kouloúri boys, donkeys braying, women laughing—and waited for the bell to ring so that we could escape. We watched the teach- er sweating away at his desk as he repeated the points of grammar over and over again in an effort to make’ them stick in our minds. But our thoughts were outside in the sun, on pebble warfare. We adored this game and often came to school with broken heads.

One divine spring day the windows were open. A tangerine tree was in bloom across the street, and its perfume entered the classroom. Each of our minds had turned into a blossoming tangerine tree; we could not bear to hear anything more about acute and circumflex accents. A bird came just then, perched on the plane tree in the schoolyard and began to sing. At that point a pale redheaded student who had arrived that year from his village, Nikoliós by name, was unable to control himself. He raised his finger. “Be quiet, sir,” he cried. “Be quiet and let us hear the bird.”

[…]

In grade four we had the principal of the school, who both reigned and governed. He was short, as tubby as a storage jar, and had a small pointed beard, gray eyes that were always angry, and bowlegs. “Good God, just look at his legs,” we used to say to each other in hushed voices so that he would not hear. “Just look how they wrap around each other. And listen to him cough. He isn’t a Cretan!” He had come to us from Athens, freshly educated, apparently bringing New Pedagogy with him. We thought it must be some young woman named Pedagogy [the word new in Greek can also mean *young woman*], but when we confronted him for the first time, he was alone. Pedagogy wasn’t there; she must have stayed at home. He was holding a small braided cowhide. He lined us up and began to lecture us. We must see and touch whatever we learned, he said, or else draw it on some paper covered with dots. And we were to look sharp. He wasn’t going to stand for any nonsense, not even laughing and shouting during recess. We were to keep our arms crossed, and whenever we saw a priest in the street, kiss his hand. “Look sharp, poor devils, because otherwise-see this?” He pointed to the cowhide. “I’m not just talking; you’ll see that I mean business!” And indeed we did see. When we were disorderly, or when he felt in a bad mood, he unbuttoned us, lowered our shorts, and thrashed our bare skin with the cowhide. And when he was too lazy to undo the buttons, he lashed us across the ears until blood flowed.

One day I fortified my heart, raised my finger, and asked, “Teacher, where is New Pedagogy? Why doesn’t she come to school?” He bounded out of his chair and removed the cowhide from its hook on the wall. “Come here, you impudent brat,” he cried. “Unbutton your pants!” He was too lazy to do it himself. “Here! Here! Here!” he bellowed as he struck. When he had worked up a sweat, he stopped. “That’s where New Pedagogy is,” he said. “Next time shut up!” But he was also a sly little devil, this husband of New Pedagogy. One day he said to us, “Tomorrow I’m going to tell you about Christopher Columbus, how he discovered America. But so you’ll understand better I want each of you to be holding an egg in his hands, and whoever doesn’t have an egg at home, let him bring some butter.”