MULTIMODAL READING ON WILLIAM BLAKE'S POEM "THE SICK ROSE": A PEDAGOGICAL PROPOSAL

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RESUMO – Ancorado na Pedagogia dos Multiletramentos (ROJO, 2012; ROJO. Barbosa, 2015; ROJO, 2013), este estudo descreve e explica a aplicabilidade de uma proposta de sequência didática, utilizando como gênero textual o poema de natureza híbrida e /ou multimodal "The Sick Rose" de William Blake. Fruto de uma experiência de prática pedagógica em aulas de Língua Inglesa no curso de graduação de Letras Inglês de uma instituição pública, este trabalho discute como os poemas de William Blake podem ser utilizados nestas aulas para instigar reflexões em textos multimodais. Embora incipiente, este trabalho traz à tona a necessidade de colocar em prática, em sala de aula, o uso do componente semiótico da linguagem (ROJO, 2013; BARBOSA, 2015; ARAÚJO. LEFFA, 2016) como instrumento mediador da interpretação de textos multimodais, considerando que a leitura multimodal, cada vez mais utilizada em nosso cotidiano, precisa ser inserida em contextos de ensino-aprendizagem como forma de motivar e orientar nossos alunos em uma leitura multimodal crítico-reflexiva em língua inglesa.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Pedagogia dos Multiletramentos; Poema; Aulas de Inglês; Leitura Multimodal.

ABSTRACT – Anchored in the Multiliteracy Pedagogy (ROJO, 2012; ROJO. BARBOSA, 2015; ROJO, 2013), this study describes and explains the applicability of a didactic sequence proposal, using as textual genre the hybrid/multimodal nature poem "The Sick Rose" by William Blake. Resulting from a pedagogical practice experience in classes of English Language in the graduation course of English language of a public institution, this work discusses how William Blake's poems can be used on English Language classes to instigate students' reflections about reading and interpretation of

multimodal texts. Although incipient, this paper brings up the necessity of putting into practice, inside classroom, the use of the semiotic component of language (ROJO, 2013; BARBOSA, 2015; ARAÚJO and LEFFA, 2016) as a mediating instrument to the interpretation of multimodal texts, considering that the multimodal reading, increasingly used in our daily lives, needs to be inserted on contexts of teaching-learning as a way of motivate and guide our students in a critical-reflexive multimodal reading in English language.

KEYWORDS – Multiliteracy Pedagogy, Poem, English class, Multimodal reading.

Introduction

In the last few years, we have witnessed various ways of literacy and its importance on the process of languages teaching-learning, mostly driven by the access to different Medias that allow the representation of ideas on more than one semiotic format. In this perspective, we present a work proposal with discursive genres, specifically from the literary sphere, from the production and application of a didactic sequence (henceforth DS) anchored in the Multi-literacy Pedagogy.

Starting from the premise that the literary genre is a singular object for the teaching of additional language, we present our didactic sequence proposal of the poem "The Sick Rose" by William Blake. Therefore, for the analysis of our experience, we organized this work into four sections: firstly, we focused on the contextualization of the production of the chosen poem and its author; in the second section, we aimed to offer a theoretical-methodological overview of multi-literacy through reading and writing multimodal practices; on the third section, we described the DS applied on a group of teachers in formation; and, to finish, we reflected about the work in general.

The socio-cultural influences on William Blake's poems

Poet, painter and typographer, William Blake was born on November 28, 1757, in London. He was the third son of James and Catherine Blake, a profoundly religious family. At age 22, he started to study at the **Royal Academy**, a school that taught drawing, painting, sculpture and architecture. Blake passed away on August 12, 1827, without the due recognition

of his contemporaries, having his funeral services paid by friends. Despite the anonymity in his time, Blake is considered one of the greatest British artists of the Romantic Era.

After studying with Joshua Reynolds (1723 – 1729) at the **Royal Academy** in London, William Blake, in opposition to the Enlightenment, preferred to cultivate the idea that creativity can only be found on imagination and not on reason which only allows a small spiritual understanding (FRYE, 1947). In his works, it is possible to perceive opinions contrary to the philosophy of the Reason Era, which attacked Christian beliefs and rejected the divine figure, emphasizing materialism. Beyond the protests mimicked in his works, Blake took part on numerous demonstrations against the rules established on his social and cultural context. He was engaged on the fight against slavery and child labor on chimney's cleansing, collaborating to the 1788 act (PALMER, 2011). Blake's political profile also derives from the strong influence of his intellectual companions, Mary Wollstonecraft, Thomas Paine, and Fuseli, touched by the radical ideas of Joseph Johnson, famous editor and bookkeeper of the 18th century (BLOOM, 2008).

Blake's political standing was also the result of his conception about religion. He though that religion deeply affected the social, cultural, economic, and psychological life of a people. This is a conception of protest and not of submission. In a time of intense political and religious tension, Blake believed that "a radical transformation of the nation's religious consciousness was the first prerequisite to serious political or economic reform" (RYAN, 2005), being a harsh critic of the atrocities made in God's name to exploit the poor, restrict political freedom, treat women as an inferior being, and discourage the art's refinement.

In sequence, we present the characteristics of structural and stylistic nature on William Blake's work.

Characteristics of William Blake's poems

According to Frye (2005) William Blake created "a radical form of mixed art" (p. 214), on which images and words are not dissociated, on the contrary, by its juxtaposition they form a homogeneous unit constituting sense. With a rare combination of simplicity and poetic intensity, Blake created essential connections among his words and images, a symbiotic relationship that turned his works into multimodal pieces (WHITSON. WHITTAKER, 2013).

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The reading of the poem without images provides an incomplete part of the poetry, depriving the reader of the dialogue with the different media and the understanding of its entirety. In relation to the constitutive elements of the poem under analysis, we verified that it is composed by eight verses, divided into two stanzas of four verses, following an ABAB/CDCD rhyme scale.

The poem "The Sick Rose" is in the book entitled **Songs of Experience** (1794). Analyzing the poem during an English language reading class, we can infer the opposition to the enlightenment thought, when we compare the depletion of the rose, caused by the worm, to the spiritual thought being corrupted by materialism and reason (BROOKS. WARREN, 1960, 237). These interpretations can be conceived not only by the literary theory bias, necessary to understand the content of the poem's genre, but also through the Multimodality theory bias (ROJO, 2013; ROJO. BARBOSA, 2015). In the Multimodality theory, two semiotic elements — color and position of the figures — are present in this poem of Blake, emphasizing the significance of its verbal written form, in the center. Therefore, in this work, we focused on the presentation of a didactic sequence (DS) (a multimodal pedagogical proposal) that has as objectives to describe and discuss how the semiotic elements 'color and position of figures' in connection with the verbal written text complement the poem's general sense.

Before we present the DS, we show the definition of 'discursive genres', since Blake's poems can be defined as 'hybrid discursive genres' because they constitute more than one language (written, color, and position of figures).

Discursive genres

We talk, write and socially interact through discursive genres (BAZERMAN, 2006; ROJO. BARBOSA, 2015). The good morning we give to our children, the grocery list, the e-mails we read and answer, the comments we write on **Facebook** and **Whatsapp** are real examples of discursive genres. Through them, we interact on a specific way. Whether in speech or written form, the genres are organized and structured according to the social context in which they are inserted. The conversation we have among family and friends is structurally different from the one we entertain with our boss, for example. And these differences, understood as

ways of communication recognized by the users (BAZERMAN, 2006) shape several discursive genres.

Figura 1[1]

Considering this role of meaning on the various spheres of human activity, the notion of genres started to be discussed by The Bakhtin Circle, in 1929, on the work **Marxism and the Philosophy of Language**: fundamental problems of the sociological method in the science of language. The scholars — Mikhail Bakhtin, Pavel Medvédev, Valentin Volochinov — argued that the discursive genres shape a speech, an enunciation, once that what is important is the meaning or the theme of those enunciations. What matters, in this perspective, are the "effects of discursive sense, the ideological echoes, the voices and appreciation of value that the discourse subject makes through statements/texts in certain genres that make possible certain linguistic choices" (ROJO. BARBOSA, 2015, p. 42). By saying, for example, "this room is hot",

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[1] https://didoisux.wordpress.com/2013/02/04/the-sick-rose/

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the effect of the sentence can evoke different meanings. The person can be just reporting what he/she is feeling (heat) or may be asking someone to turn on the air conditioner (in the case the sentence is said while the speaker looks to the air conditioner).

Discursive genres can also be conceptualized by their "textual characteristics" that indicate what they represent. These textual characteristics allow us to visualize the text typology and the purpose of the genre (BAZERMAN, 2006). To illustrate, while **cartoons** present brief messages of political nature with hints of humor, comics are more extensive.

In this study, the discursive genre debated is poem. Although this genre is initially defined within literary studies as a literary genre, we can classify it as discursive genre because it presents specific textual, stylistic and content characteristics. Unlike the non-literary discursive genres — e-mails, blog, chats, report, scientific paper, commercial letter — the poem presents a combination of words and other poetic criteria (sound and rhythm) to the construction of meaning. In literary discourse, in the case of poem, come into question the rhythm, elaboration of verses, sonority, figures of speech with sound effect (alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia) and the metrification in the construction of the meaning unit. All these aspects intertwine for the production of various meanings. Namely, in general the poem allows more than one interpretation (GOLDSTEIN, 1990).

For this work, we discussed how the discursive genre poem, more specifically the poems of the poet and painter William Blake, can be used in classes of English language to instigate students' reflections about the reading and interpretation of multimodal texts. Many of William Blake's poems are multimodal, and, because of this, demand that the reader, besides reading and interpreting what is written, also know how to relate the written part with the imaging elements (colors, objects, images) that are in his poems in order to interpret the poem as a whole — written and imaging language.

Below, we present and discuss the notion of Literacy (KLEIMAN, 1995) and of Multi-literacy (ROJO, 2012; ROJO, 2013; ROJO. BARBOSA, 2015) to debate how William Blake's poems, of multimodal nature, can serve as a mediating instrument in the reading classes in English language.

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From literacy to multi-literacies

The term **literacy**, of English origin, appeared on 1980's decade and, according to Kleiman (1995), proposed by Mary Kato, in 1986 in Brazil with the goal of denominate and identify social practices of writing. Compared to the process of alphabetizing — process through which the language user acquires knowledge of the linguistic code — the literacy, on the contrary, requires from the user the competence of producing and understanding several social practices that involve the abilities of reading and writing.

Studies about literacy in Brazil have been debated to describe and understand the conditions of use of writing in various social contexts (KLEIMAN, 1995). For example, we can study how literacy practices of minority groups of a particular institution work and what social, affective and linguistic repercussions those practices mean in their social environments. Namely, the understanding of how the subjects' language organizes and develops itself under particular literacy events and the implication of those practices in the interactions in which they emerge and evolve, the concept of literacy drives us to the examination of the competence of the users to reflect about the language they use and what they use it for.

According to Soares (2004), the individual who reads, understand what is reading, and writes with the purpose of accomplish daily activities, is defined as a literate person. For example, when we make a list of kitchen items in order to buy groceries, we are acting as a literate person because we are making use of written language to fulfill daily necessities. This alphabetized and literate individual can also be denominated as a multi-literate person. Which means that the fact of some illiterate people cannot recognize the linguistic code do not prevent them from reading the world around them. This world is full of colors and shapes that, by themselves, emanate varied meanings. A certain moment, observing two ladies at a market close to my home, I realized they were buying personal items based on visual information. When one of them asked me if that hygiene product was meant for normal hair I noticed that totally illiterate people — the case of that lady — shop based on the visual/imaging information that can be related to colors and shapes of the products — for example, mayonnaise is white, ketchup is red, and mustard is yellow.

These new practices of reading and writing take us to multimodal practices and, consequently, to new literacies, also known as multi-literacies (ROJO, 2013). The multi-literacies

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occur in multimodal texts. These texts present semiotic variety (visual, audio, sound, color, shapes, images) in only one space and all of these imagery and sound resources, also called multisemiotics, unite themselves for the construction of the whole meaning of a particular text. Words and images make a significant whole in a given discursive genre. To illustrate, we can imagine an advertisement of McDonalds. On it, we can identify the red and yellow colors that can instigate hunger, the particular desire of eating the sandwich. We can verify the constancy of the yellow color on sandwiches, not only on week days, but also on the cheese. The semiotic element 'color' in combination with the verbal written one, characteristic of the discursive genre 'advertising' complements the message of the advertisement. Hybrid discursive genres such as advertisement — hybrid because it has more than one semiotic aspect or language mode in only one space — demand a multimodal reading (Rojo, 2013).

Figure 2
Mcdonalds advertisement[2]

First appeared in 1996 with the 'New London Group', the Multi-literacy Pedagogy brings to the surface the necessity of perceive and use the various languages (semioses) that are around us (audio-visual, sound, color, movements, gestures, facial expression) to teaching and learning purposes, and not only the written verbal language that schools, most commonly, have been exploring as school practices (ROJO, 2013). This new pedagogical approach considers the technology that we use in our daily lives: new digital technologies of information (TDICs).

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[2] Source: http://www.mcdonalds.com.br/promocoes/classico-do-dia/

Because we are involved in "new technologies, new texts, new languages" (ROJO. BARBOSA, 2015, p. 116), we need to be attentive to the use of semiotic resources and take advantage of them, in a pedagogically conscious way, inside our classrooms.

Among the existing semiotic elements that form multimodal texts (sound, color, audio-visual, visual, gesture, facial expressions, body language, shapes, traces, lines), the color element has been target of investigation in several hybrid discursive genres, since it is useful to emphasize the written message; for example, just as shown on the above advertisement. Having this explanation in mind, on this worked we focused on the discussion about how the color element together with the drawings positioning on the poem "The Sick Rose" by William Blake is fundamental to understand the written part and its implications to various interpretations.

On the following section, we discuss how the multimodal elements 'color' and 'drawings positioning' (elements explored during the classes) on the poem "The Sick Rose" by William Blake, contribute to the meaning of the poem.

Didactic sequence proposal in the reading of William Blake's poems

Starting from the assumptions of Dolz, Noverraz and Schneuwly (2004) for the elaboration of didactic materials around textual genres, we created a didactic sequence[3] of the poem "The Sick Rose". The mentioned authors assume that "genres are constituted as real semiotic complex tools which mediate the language action, allowing the text production" (MACHADO. CRISTOVÃO, 2009, 128) and define the structure of the didactic sequence as follows:

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[3] The authors conceive a didactic sequence as "a group of scholar activities, organized in a systematic way, around an oral or written textual genre". (2009, 82).
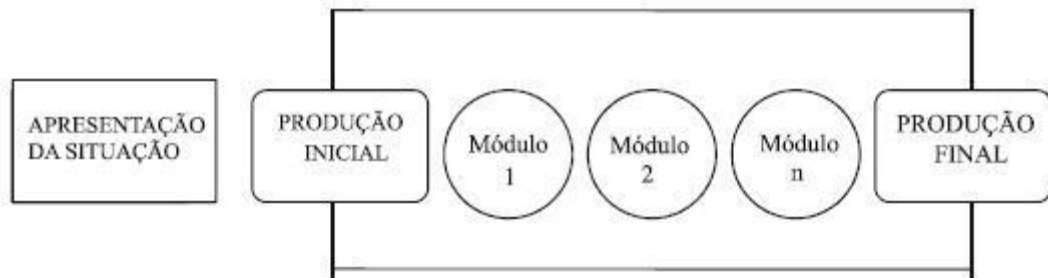
Figure 03: Didactic Sequence Scheme
(Source: DOLZ; NOVERRAZ, SCHNEUWLY, 2004, p. 83)

However, for this work, we made some necessary adaptations to the scheme, aiming to a better dentistry of the chosen genre, once that the DS's objective is "to help the student to master a textual genre, allowing him/her to write or speak in a more adequate way". In our specific case, we seek to guide the students to future readings of hybrid discursive genres (final production), always calling their attention to the imaging elements, strongly present on contemporary texts circulating in our hypermodern society[4] (ROJO. BARBOSA, 2005) for them to act in/for the language.

Thus, the presentation of the situation and the DS Initial Production were made through the first reading of the chosen poem, in order to investigate the level of comprehension of the text, "as well as the mentioning of possible linguistic difficulties and of recognition of literary structures" (RIOS-REGISTRO, 2014, p. 269).

Blake's poem **The Sick Rose** was ministered in the curricular component English Language 2, morning shift of the semester 2017.1, with a length of four hours per week, in the English Language graduation course offered by the State University of Paraíba, campus I, located in Campina Grande, Paraíba state. The data collection was made through (a) classroom observation and (b) recording of these observations on a journal. The group observed had 14 students; most of them (about nine students) had an intermediate proficiency level, presenting

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[4] The concept of hypermodernity is related to the "(…) new ways of being, of behaving, of discourse, of relating, of informing oneself, of learning" (ROJO. BARBOSA, 2015, p. 116), typical ways of the new technological era in which we are inserted.

good resourcefulness in oral production. The class ministered on September 28, 2017, reference for this paper, lasted two hours and had as goal the reading and interpretation of Blake's poem **The Sick Rose**, so the students could learn the reading and multimodal analysis of hybrid discursive genres.

DS's first module has as objective the contextualization through two activities: the first one to activate students' knowledge about the colors meaning in daily life, and the second one to discover what the students knew about the meaning of colors in a specific event. In the first activity, the professor asked how we understand the meaning of colors in daily life. Few students answered. From 14, 2 said to be conscious about those meanings during our days. One of them said that in the streets, for example, in traffic lights, they call our attention for what we need to do. A red traffic light means **stop**, a yellow sign raise our awareness, and a green light means we can go on.

The second activity was linked to a more specific context. The professor asked if they remembered another context that referred to the meaning of colors. There was silence. So, the professor asked about recurrent colors in Rock in Rio (at that moment, we were experiencing the music festival called Rock in Rio, at Rio de Janeiro). Most of them answered black, red, and a little white. The professor asked the meaning of those colors in that context. Most of the students answered that black symbolized darkness, red points to blood and violence, and also something vibrant. One of the students mentioned that, among those negative meanings, the white color could symbolize peace. Taking the students' speech into account, the professor explained that the meaning of the colors changes according to the context in which they are used. Therefore, the meaning of the colors is pragmatic (LEVINSON, 1983), which means that we can infer a specific meaning of a color only in a particular context.

In this activity, we could notice that the meaning of the semiotic element 'color', present in our daily life, tends to remain unnoticed by many students. Just a few of them are aware of this element and how it can contribute for the interpretation of diverse situations.

The second module consisted of two activities about the poem. In the first activity, the professor emphasized the content and its relationship with the semiotic element **color**. The professor asked the students how the words and colors referred to the title **The Sick Rose**. One student commented the leaves on top of the poem seemed to be brighter and the lower

ones were lighter, as if they were disappearing; a common feature of wilted and fallen roses. Another student said that this feature could also be associated to the sick Rose. Before, the Rose could be healthy, information related to the brighter colors of the poem, such as the darker Pink; after, it got sick, and the poem shows the Rose with lighter colors. The contrast between colors more and less vibrant could implicate on the changing of the Rose from healthy to sick.

Still in relation to the colors, William Blake used two nuances of green, with two meanings. These comments were made by three of the 14 students, which is valid to be mentioned. The light green (on the lower part of the illustration) was accompanied by the sentence "Does thy life destroy". In here, we can verify that the meaning of the word — "*destroy*" — was being emphasized by the light green that, according to its position (fallen), meant that the rose was sick. In its turn, the dark green (on picture's upper side) was closer to the sentence "thy bed of crimson joy", describing a healthy moment of the rose. The word "*joy*", with a positive meaning, was close to a vibrant dark green leaf, a healthy color. This means that, for Blake, the leaves' colors followed the transformation of the rose described in the poem.

The second activity of module 2 matched the meaning of the poem in relation to the figures positioning. About the aspect 'figures positioning' — other semiotic element — one student pointed out the rose's position (lying down), making reference to the title. Such observation seemed relevant. As the rose was lying on the ground, this could be a reference to its state of sickness, like the title shows. Healthy roses are well exposed; sick roses are wilted and fallen. Two other students said that **the worms**, positioned on the upper side of the picture, resembled a woman's image, but there was no justification for the comment. The professor came to the conclusion that just a few students made this type of observation (4 from 14).

Still talking about the figures positioning, some students made relevant comments. For example, **the worms** were spread on the upper side, on the trees, descending towards the Rose, as if they were searching for it — one of the poem's sentences points to this (*have found out — the rose in its bed*). Such observation can lead to the interpretation that before the worms find it, the Rose was healthy and happy. Many students observed this (9 from 14). The poet wrote that the Rose was happy (**joy**) becoming sick afterwards, when the worms found it. These observations were made by both students and professor. At this moment, the shared knowledge about the positioning seemed to be bigger than the one related to the colors.

Despite the fact they were few, the students who made the comments seemed to notice, even in a subconscious way, the pragmatic and interactive meanings of the elements 'color' and 'drawing positioning' on poems like the ones written by Blake. This pragmatic knowledge (LEVINSON, 1983) is necessary to understand that various language modes interact to create a unique meaning in a particular context (ROJO, 2013; ROJO. BARBOSA, 2015).

The professor also concluded that, although some students started to make these associations after the use of these semiotic elements was emphasized by the examples, just a few students were active participants and made a small number of inferences. Most of them identified the words and/or expressions referring to the sickness state of the rose, but just a few explained their reasons for those choices. Some students said that the light pink (depicted on the fallen rose) and the light green leaves (positioned on the lower side of the poem alongside the fallen rose) on the part describing that the rose got sick could also be a non-verbal resource to emphasize the Rose's state.

Because it was a DS focused on reading, the final production was the homework requested by the professor: the reading and interpretation of another Blake's poem, "The Night Poem", following the same analysis criteria applied on "The Sick Rose", object of discussion of this work.

According to the comments made by the students during this class, we can infer that just a few of them have the understanding of the importance of colors' meanings and figures poisoning present in hybrid discursive genres like William Blake's poem. From this observation, we can say that the professors need to emphasize the semiotic language inside our classrooms more times, as a way of bringing to the surface the fact that this language can complement and/or add other meanings to the written language (ROJO, 2013; ROJO. BARBOSA, 2015).

Final remarks

According to the students' comments presented, stressing that this study brings just a cut of the multimodal reading classes ministered in English Language, we can infer that, despite of being incipient, the professor aims to bring to the surface the language semiotic component during the classes (ROJO, 2013; ROJO. BARBOSA, 2015; ARAÚJO. LEFFA, 2016), as a mediating instrument to the interpretation of multimodal texts. This teaching practice, endorsed

by the Multimodality and Pragmatic Theories (Levinson, 1983), makes us reflect about the real necessity of inserting in our classrooms new ways of learning and teaching discursive genres in additional languages. Multimodal reading, increasingly used outside school's walls, needs to be inserted in classrooms as a way of motivate and guide our students to a more critical-reflexive reading of varied modes of language in English language.

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APPENDIX

Didactic sequence

THEME: Guidance for the reading and interpretation of hybrid discursive genres.

OBJECTIVE: To guide the students in the reading and interpretation of William Blake's poem: example of hybrid discursive genre.

Date: 10/28/2017.

Lenght: two hours.

1st MODULE: **Objective:** To activate students' knowledge about multimodal reading on the poem *The Sick Rose* by William Blake.

Activity 1: How do we understand the colors meanings in our daily life? This activity consisted in a discussion with the whole group of students.

Activity 2: Which are the recurrent colors in Rock in Rio (at that moment, we were experiencing the music festival called Rock in Rio, at Rio de Janeiro) and how they are related to the event? This activity consisted in a general discussion with the students.

2nd MODULE: Objective: Discussion and reflection about the semiotic elements — colors and figure positioning — on the poem *The Sick Rose* by William Blake.

Activity 1: How the words and colors refer to the title '*The Sick Rose*'? This activity was a general discussion with the students.

Activity 2: How the figures' positioning relate to the poem's sense? This activity was a general discussion with the students.

FINAL PRODUCTION: Objective: Homework. To make a reading and interpretation of William Blake's poem *The Night Poem*, taking into consideration a) the poem's message; b) the presence of multimodal elements and its relationship with the message.

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