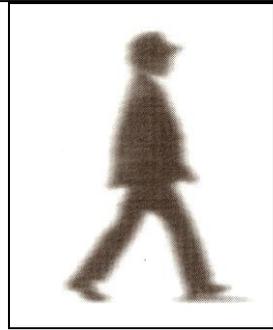


One Page Synopsis: Staging Lesson „The Walk with Robert Walser“

„To walser“ means to go on a walk through reality as an endowed self with waking senses and then to transform that walk into a walk over the paper after returning.



The Walker. Robert Walser? Detail of a photograph from his time.

«One morning, as the desire to take a walk came over me, I put my hat on my head, left my writing room, or room of phantoms, and ran down the stairs to hurry out into the street.»

This is how Robert Walser (1878-1956) – also called the Swiss «Kafka» – begins his prose piece «The Walk» in 1917.



A student on his outside walk

«'All this,' so I proposed resolutely, 'I shall soon sketch and write down in a piece or sort of fantasy, which I shall entitle "The Walk."»

These are his words some 20 pages later in an exemplary text which also contains his entire poetics.



The class, back from their outside walk, while writing their "walk" texts following Walser's method

If we want to make Walser's story to come to life again in our staging lesson, we should best follow his instructions. Can we "walser" as well? The proof of the pudding is in the eating! After a brief introduction by the author, who demonstrates the initial scene and the return with his hat and umbrella, played by the teacher, we all become attentive walkers and collect our impressions on Walser's traces – almost a hundred years after him. After an hour of attentive recording outside we return to our "writing room" or "room of phantoms", i.e. back to the classroom and begin our walk again with the pen over the paper. (Because we are not all calligraphers like Walser and since we want to edit our texts, we can also use our laptops.)

Biel, 1917 and 2009

Now we get an overview of Walser's text, discover its construction, the outside and the inside, we listen to his lyrical "earality" in the reading by an actor, but also detect its historic relevance in a detailed analysis.

Finally, we have a look at the sceneries and compare them now and then. We are now strengthening all of these aspects in our walk texts, and present our revisions to the others in the class and expose them to mutual criticism (important: the text attempts of the teacher are handled in the same way as those of the students.)

Without walking, I would be dead!

During all his life, Robert Walser did not make the public breakthrough and so fell silent. In 1917, however, in the half-time of his life, he stood creatively at the zenith of his work. 1913, after the failure of his novelist career in Berlin, he returned to Biel, his native town, and started a new attempt to be recognized as a writer.

With the making of his "Stückli" short prose, he had found his form at that time, and in "The Walk" he formulated his poetic method, which immediately becomes clear as a learning, exploration and world-shaping process, as Walser's narrator here explains to a tax officer:

"The superintendent or inspector of taxes said: "But you're always to be seen out for a walk!"

"Walk," was my answer, "I definitely must, to invigorate myself and to maintain contact with the living world, without perceiving which I could neither write the half of one more single word, nor produce a poem in verse or prose. Without walking, I would be dead, and would have long since been forced to abandon my profession, which I love passionately."



The class on the literary walk in the Old Town of Biel before the former house of the city administration, where the above scene plays.

On the tour, which is marked with signs in Biel, we learn how Walser grew up here as a child and an adolescent, and we follow his "walk" here and now.