

Poetry Unit

TOM DESHOTELS / SPRING 2004

This unit is inspired by Sheridan Blau's *The Literature Workshop: Teaching Texts and Their Readers*, Bruce Emra's *Coming of Age: Literature About Youth and Adolescence*, Katie Schultz's poetry unit, and Jennifer Viland's sensory poetry lesson.

Objectives

- To encourage students to observe and critique various forms of poetic language present in their daily lives
- To recognize various tools commonly employed in poetry by reviewing and locating poetic devices in a wide range of poems/songs.
- To introduce poetic terms and techniques and show students how to employ these when writing their own poems
- To break down stereotypical notions and fears surrounding poetry and replace them with applicable knowledge and skills
- To create a poetry portfolio, which includes personal poetry samples, brainstorming, reflection, and poetry related multi-media projects
- To meet Standard 6, (Communication), by encouraging the use of verbal, nonverbal, and media communication techniques throughout the lessons.

The unit makes use of collaboration, inquiry, and interaction at many different instructional points.

Target Students

This lesson is intended for grade 10, but can be adapted to meet the needs of other learners as well.

Structure/Organization

The unit is divided into 3 weeks; the first 2 weeks focusing on different poetic forms, and the last week on creating/compiling poetry/song portfolios.

Week 1: Music and Poetry

Materials: CD player, popular music CDs

Topic: Critiquing Poetic Qualities of Popular Music: Teacher will bring in 2-3 (age-appropriate) popular music CDs along with printed out lyrics for the songs played. Have the CDs playing as the students enter the room. Teacher will note some of the student comments (anonymously) about the music being played. Do not initially tell the class why the music is playing, but instead let them ponder this question individually or as they converse with one another. As the class organizes, ask everyone to listen to the music and write down a few personal reactions they have to it. Ask students to be specific in their

responses and let them know that their reactions can be positive, negative, or neutral. Do not have them write names on their papers. Teacher will also write down their own reactions and some of the verbal comments overheard as the students first entered the room.

After about 10 minutes, have everyone hand in reactions, which will then be read aloud. Ask for input and critical discussion throughout this process. After discussing for awhile, ask the following questions:

1. Why would this music have anything to do with English class?
2. What do you notice about the reactions people have to this particular song? (differing opinions, emotionally charged, etc.)
3. Might the reactions be different if the song was about something else? Or if it was Slower/Faster/Louder/Softer?
4. What does the author/artist have to do with the song? Did he/she write the words? How does this affect your opinion about the music?
5. Do these song lyrics or this song, remind anyone of a poem? Why or why not?

Discuss the above questions, making sure to elaborate and make parallels between poems and song lyrics. Ask questions and make sure that students thoroughly support their answers. Create an environment that fosters critical thinking about the examples presented by asking challenging and incisive questions.

For the following day, ask students to bring in an example of a song with lyrics that they strongly like or dislike. A stipulation is that the song has to be appropriate (no swearing or negative messages, sex, etc.) Along with the CD or tape (if possible), ask students to hand in a short paper containing: 1. The song title and artist 2. A transcription or print-out of the song lyrics 3. A 2 paragraph response explaining the song's message and a personal opinion about the song.

Topic: Comparing Poetic Text and Musical Lyrics, Sharing Examples of Music: A discussion of poetry and song will begin the class. Teacher will present a song and a text-poem that are similar (i.e. about the same topic and/or with the same message). As a group, have the class discuss common features between the song and poem presented. Some similar features might be: * use of metaphor * use of descriptive language *emotional resonance * the beat of the language, etc.

In a circular arrangement of desks, have students, one by one, come to the middle of the group to present their song. They will first read a brief excerpt of the lyrics, then play a short excerpt of the song. Finally they will share whether or not they liked the piece they selected. Responses from the class will be invited, making sure to remind students that they should be thinking critically and giving well-supported reasons for their opinions. Have students share adjectives describing the music and/or the feelings it evokes in them. 10-15 students will be able to share their selections and the others will either be asked to wait until the following day.

The class will conclude with another overview describing the poetic features of song lyrics of different kinds. Students will be invited to ask questions and to challenge each other on what features are necessary for something to be labeled poetic.

Topic: Sharing Examples of Music, continued: The class will once again arrange itself for students to share their music choices (hopefully we can get through all of them today). As was done before, discussion will follow after each selection. Students will reflect on word choices, background music, and

overall effectiveness of each song has in conveying a particular mood. Additionally students will be invited to speculate on why they personally like or dislike a song.

After finishing the sharing process, we will discuss the topics of the songs and point out similarities and differences between them. Teacher might choose to show some poetry and spoken word videos or recordings.

Topic: Composing Poems Workshop, Writing Song Lyrics: After pointing out connections between Tupac's song "Changes" and poem "And 2morrow," students will write an Inspired Poem based on the selection for their favorite song/poem. Inspired poems should have 8 lines of original writing. Students will be asked to include vivid adjectives and details in order to successfully create the mood they wish to describe. After working individually for a short time, students will form groups to combine their ideas and compose one poem to present to the class. Alternatively, students can re-write one of their favorite song's lyrics with their original lyrics to the music.

At end of class, have students respond to "What is a poet?" with reply by E.E. Cummings. How does Cummings respond to the question? Do you agree? What do you think a poet is?

Topic: Conclusion of Week: Workshop Sensory Poem. Have students:

1. Describe a vivid memory/experience in as much detail as possible.
2. What senses are evoked from those memories? Discuss which senses were evoked with your workshop group.
3. Review terms:

Metaphor: describing one thing in terms of comparing it to another.

Simile: describing one thing in terms of comparing it to another using a connecting word like *like* or *as*.

4. Describe an emotion using your senses using the vivid sensory details from your memory. As a starting point, give the emotion a color for the sense of sight. Then say how it sounds, feels, smells, and tastes.

Model:

(emotion) is (a color)

It sounds like...

It feels like...

It smells like...

It tastes like...

Example:

Success is red.

It sounds like claps and cheers.

It feels like a pat on the back.

It smells like flowers in the spring.

It tastes as sweet as a mother's kiss.

Read “Geraldine Moore the Poet” and ask for responses to how Geraldine was just describing a day and it turned in to a poem.

After all groups are done presenting, the instructor will present a brief conclusion to the “Music and Poetry” lesson, highlighting the important parallels between lyrics and poetry by integrating some of the students’ work.

Week 2 – Analysis of Poetry

Topic: Have students respond to “What is poetry?” with reply by T.S. Eliot. How does Eliot respond to the question? Do you agree? What do you think poetry is?

Focus on interpretation looking at “My Papa’s Waltz” and “For Julia, In the Deep Water” in class and workshop responses. How do the speakers in these poems mislead and direct you as a reader? What specific words do you find troubling? What specific words give you a glimpse to the meaning in the poem? How does the tone help you identify meaning? Review metaphor and workshop/write a poem that has a double meaning.

Topic: SOAP method of poem analysis. SOAP stands for Speaker Occasion Audience Purpose. Identify each of these things in a poem as a model for workshop groups to practice.

Using the internet laptops, groups locate a poem and apply the SOAP method to a poem they find. Students then identify poetic devices. Finally, students should attempt to find some meaning about the poem. Have workshop groups present the poem to the large group with their analysis.

Topic: Background Knowledge. Today we will be highlighting the importance of background knowledge about a poet, a genre, historical period and so forth. The idea I want to get across is that students should not be thrown off after reading a poem the first time but by getting to know more information surrounding the poem, a greater understanding may be fostered.

Poems we will look at are, “Pitcher,” “The Death of a Ball Turret Gunner,” and “For Valerie.” Workshop groups will be asked these questions after we have read each poem a few times. Regarding “Pitcher”: What is this poem about? If you did not know anything about baseball, would “Pitcher” make sense to you? What do all of the ideas you have come up with have in common? You have to know about baseball. Regarding “The Death of a Ball Turret Gunner”: What is this poem about? What sort of words appear in the poem that belong to a very distinct subject (flak, turret)? Do you still use the term flak today, as in, *Don’t give me any flak?* You have to know about WWII. Have one person from the each workshop group be designated as reader and read “For Valerie.” The other group members should pretend that they are William Shakespeare and try to make sense of the poem. What knowledge is Shakespeare lacking to

understand all of the words in the poem? Remember to act like Shakespeare when you try to make sense of the poem. What is true for Shakespeare is true for us. We will have a hard time understanding completely some of the cultural knowledge from his time not because we are stupid or ignorant, but because we just were not around to gather that basic information. We become more culturally aware when we spend more time in that culture, or literary genre.

Topic: Two Poems by Gwendolyn Brooks. Have workshop groups read “The Bean Eaters” and “We Real Cool” and discuss the poems together. Do not mention anything about Gwendolyn Brooks but let the students read the poems in their groups. Construct possible meanings of the poems. What are they talking about? What devices are used in the poem? After hearing some responses, play the tape of Gwendolyn Brooks explaining and reading her poems. Ask students: How does having Gwendolyn Brooks’ own explanation to her poetry help you understand? How does it hinder your understanding?

Topic: In-class essay. Choose one poem that we have read so far in this unit and analyze what the poem means and how you arrived at that meaning using textual evidence.

Week 3 – Poetry as Expression and Performance

Topic: Poetry versus prose. Poetry – Mighty Mouse of Expression. How does poetry address an issue/idea compared to an essay or short story? Read the short story “First Love” as a class. Then read the poem “Where Have You Gone.” What is different about the way these two formats approach a similar topic? How is their impact different? What does this say about poetry? Continue to workshop poems from earlier in the unit.

Topic: Bring in the short story “Faces” and have students write a poem that captures the same tone and idea of the story. Finish any outstanding workshop stuff.

Topic: Go to “America’s Favorite Poem.” Create chapbooks. Include art or sketches if you want.

Topic: “What did you learn about poetry” journal.

Topic: Last two days. Student presentations. Show a clip from “So I Married an Axe Murderer” with Mike Meyers reading his poem. Students read two selections from their chapbook and explain them to class. If student refuses to read own work they must find a partner and the two must exchange chapbooks and read his/her partner’s work. As students read their poems, classmates must write down a word or image that stand out from ten (10) of the presentations. Then everyone journals about one poem they heard in class that day. View parts of “Poetry Slam” video if possible.

Assessment

- Chapbook (60 points):

- Poetry terms (5 points)

- Favorite Song/Poem (5 points)

- Inspired Poem (10 points)

- “What is a Poet?”(5 points)

- Sensory Poem (10 points)

- “What is Poetry?” (5 points)

- One page response (10 points)

- Prose into Poetry (10 points)

- Group analysis and presentation of poem (30 points)

- Student presentations of chapbook (30 points)

- Presentation responses (10 points)

130 total points