



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1985 Volume I: Poetry

Poetry For The Remedial Reader

Curriculum Unit 85.01.04
by Edwina E. Johnson

Poetry has been a subject which is not familiar to me. I have had only a brief understanding and some background information on the subject.

Consequently, I chose to engage myself in writing a curriculum unit on Poetry. My memories of Poetry in Elementary, Middle and High School are vague. It was a subject that I was not familiar with.

When I took over a class of remedial students at Betsy Ross School, I was filled with excitement, hope and ideas to share with my prospective students. I had previous records to read and discuss with my co-workers. I was hopeful and excited although I had been told the students were a select group who had difficulty having positive experiences in a school setting.

In general, I found the students to be children who needed a lot of positive reinforcement. Many of them had been humiliated in school settings. The children had also failed academically. Many of the students had disrespected and humiliated their former teachers. In short, their educational experiences had not been positive.

The children consisted of 32 students. 90% were males and the other 10% females. The children needed information in regard to acceptable social behavior, which had not been incorporated into the minds of my students.

They needed to believe that they were accepted, cared for and worthwhile individuals. They had very low self-esteem if any at all.

The children also needed remediation in the areas of English and Mathematics. Every attempt initially was interpreted as an opportunity to put them down and they immediately began to defend themselves before you could explain what you wanted to talk with them about.

If I made a gesture of a physical nature toward the students, they ducked or dodged away from me as though I were going to hit or hurt them in some way.

My goals were to teach the students:

- (1) acceptable social behavior (self-control)
- (2) listening skills
- (3) reading skills
- (4) grammar
- (5) realization of self-worth
- (6) edification of their strengths (socially and academically)
- (7) how to accept remedial help
- (8) to try to trust teachers, administrators and themselves

John came to me in December 1984. As usual, I allowed the student to tell the class why or how he happened to be in this particular program. I was surprised at the story he told because most of the student population, which totaled 22 at this time, told the truth about why they were in this program.

He seemed to joke and laugh at almost anything. He was a clown in short. However, I soon realized that “clowning” was his way of being accepted by the other students. It was the manner in which he kept the other students from “ganging” up and beating him up. He allowed himself to be ridiculed in order to not have to fight his peers. I stood back and watched him operate.

I experienced a sense of pain to think that this child resorted to allowing himself to be verbally abused in order to gain acceptance.

Initially he made attempts to work and following directions, As the year progressed, and the other students realized he was not a threat, he had no difficulty with his peers.

However he then began to be disruptive in the classroom. The bottom line seemed to be to keep in good standing with his classmates and win their approval and acceptance.

In summation, I would have to say that I didn’t feel as though he improved his behavior very much which was an important part of what I was trying to accomplish.

Pierre came to my class in March 1985. He was very vocal from the beginning. He seemed to know the other students, who were boys for the most part.

He appeared “rough and tough,” but it was not long before I realized he would fight and act belligerent only if he had to. He explained to me that he had to fight in his other school because other students were constantly challenging him.

We developed a trusting relationship and he would talk with me freely and openly about school, home etc. This student did modify his behavior to an extent and consequently he will be going to High School in the fall.

I felt as though I succeeded with Pierre, but not with John because the student had very low esteem and had not built a strong, relationship with his family.

My overall objective is to introduce Poetry to my students in an interesting and stimulating manner. Students who are not highly motivated and in need of remedial help will benefit from the study of this unit.

I intend to start with the lyrics of popular songs and then move to Poetry. I also hope to improve my knowledge of poetry, its origin, significance and influence in the past and present.

Lesson Plan

- I. I will give the students background information in the form of mini lectures.
- II. Initially I would start the class by giving the students song lyrics on paper without telling them what it is they are reading.
- III. After the class has had sometime to look over the lyrics, I will play a tape of the same song of a popular artist such as Michael Jackson or David Lee Roth.
- IV. I would pose discussion questions such as "What is the theme of the poem?" "What significance (meaning) does it have for you?"
- V. I have had the students do some writing this year. I gave the students topics such as Love, Friendship, Happiness, Sadness etc. to get them started. The students will be divided into groups of 3-4 students and allowed to collaborate on their work. The students will also be allowed to work alone.
- VI. I will collect the poems and go over them and hand them back to the students.
- VII. The students will make corrections, revisions and additions.

The poets I will use in my curriculum unit are Langston Hughes, Emily Dickinson, Imamu Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones), Miguel Algarin, Miguel Pinero, and Julio Marzan.

I will give the class background information on each poet. The underlying purpose will be to enable the students to better understand the author. The class will be informed of the lifestyle the author led, when and where he or she lived.

The authors I have chosen are of Black, White and Hispanic descent. My purpose is to represent my entire student population which will be comprised of the various groups of people.

I feel as though these authors will catch and hold the interest of my students.

I had formerly begun to work with “Limericks” in my class. In addition I will introduce or review the

- a. simile
- b. metaphor
- c. stanza

I feel as though it will be valuable to approach the class with song lyrics initially because they will be familiar with the artists and to illustrate the similarity between music and poetry.

Our study of Poetry will be beneficial to my class because it will (1) improve their reading skills (2) enable and facilitate their writing Poetry (3) improve their understanding of Poetry.

The poems I will utilize are as follows:

Mother To Son, Morning After, Shakespeare In Harlem, and Ballad of The Gypsy by Langston Hughes.

The Day Came Slow—Till Five O’Clock I Like To See It Lap The Miyles and Wild Nights—Wild Nights by Emily Dickinson.

Cold Term, Song Form, Air, A Poem For Black Hearts, Ballad of The Morning Streets and Red Light by Imamu Aniri Baraka.

Love Without Love, Call Out My Number and Maced by Luis Llorens Torres.

Neither This Nor That by Luis Pales Matos.

The Night Has Twenty-Four Hours By Pedro Juan Pietri

Underground Poetry by Pedro Pietri

About the Rats by Jorge Lopez (Translation by Miguel Pinero)

Dedicated to Maria Rodriguez Martinez by Lucky Cien Fuegos (translation by Miguel Algarin)

I will teach the unit one day a week, because I find it necessary to change what I do in class so as not to bore the students and keep the class interested.

Bibliography

Algarin, Miguel and Miguel Pinero, ed. *Nuyorican Poetry*, , “An Anthology of Puerto Rican Words and Feelings” William Morrow & Company Inc. copyright 1975.

Gottesman, Ronald, Laurence B. Holland, David Kalstone, Francis Murphy, Hershel Parker, William H. Pritchard. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* , Volume 1, W.W. Norton & Company, copyright 1979.

Hughes, Langston. *Selected Poems* . Vintage Books, copyright 1974.

Koch, Kenneth. *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams* , “Teaching Children To Write Poetry”, Harper & Row Publishers, copyright 1980.

Koch, Kenneth and Kate Farrell. *Sleeping On The Wing* , “An Anthology of Modern Poetry with Essays on Reading and Writing”, Vintage Books, copyright 1973.

Marzan, Julio, ed. *Inventing A Word* , “An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Puerto Rican Poetry, Columbia University Press, copyright 1980.

Scholes, Robert. *Elements of Poetry*, “A Handbook of Poetry”, Oxford University Press, copyright 1969.

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>