



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
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## The Poet's Eye

Curriculum Unit 01.03.10  
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The Poet's Eye is designed for high school creative writing students (meeting daily in 40-minute blocks) to cover a period of one semester, or approximately eighteen weeks. National and state literacy standards have been taken into account in the writing of this unit, which are reflected in an interdisciplinary approach that combines poetry, philosophy, even physics into the mix of writing poetry. And why not? Physics sans mathematics is poetry, or as Gary Zukav reminds us in his 1979 American Science award-winning book, *The Wu Li Dancing Masters*, "Physics, in essence, is simple wonder at the way things are and a divine (some call it compulsive) interest in how that is so. Mathematics is a tool of physics. Stripped of mathematics, physics becomes pure enchantment." (p. 4) Therefore, the mission of this unit is to instill, activate, and recharge a sense of wonder for our students, and to offer them poetic form as a conduit through which to express it. As William Shakespeare wrote in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* :

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,  
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;  
And as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation and a name.

Guiding students to find "a local habitation and a name" for their searches, their dreams, their imaginations is the focus of this curriculum unit, wherein poetic form offers them the medium for self expression. In the process of finding their own unique voices, students will embark on a journey that will take them "from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven" on the sound waves emanated from voices past and present that had found and continue to find their greatest expression in the art of poetry.

Giving shape to "the forms of things unknown" will challenge students to observe the world around them as well as to envision their inner worlds. Perception, perspective, and introspection comprise the anatomy of "the poet's eye." The means by which these qualities will be introduced and skills honed will be through topical interdisciplinary lessons. From Kahlil Gibran's prophetic phrases to Wu Li (the Chinese word for "physics,"

which also translates as "patterns of organic energy"), students will be introduced to philosophical concepts as food for thought, and hopefully, inspiration.

## Curriculum Unit Contents Guide & Pedagogical Rationale

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In order to write poetry, the poem has to be defined and the medium in which it is written, language, has to be understood. Kenneth Koch in his book, *Making Your Own Days*, thinks of poetry as a "separate language . . . Poetry lasts because it gives the ambiguous an ever-changing pleasure of being both a statement and a song." (p.21) In that musical statement we find a host of language tools that can be employed to tinker through the process of creating a poem. The Poet's Eye introduces students to several poetic devices and poetic forms. The spine of the curriculum (as indicated by its title) upon which unit sections are structured addresses perspective: How we see the world around us; How we can open our minds to different points of view; How we can distill these visions down to essences or essential qualities. These three main objectives are incorporated into three main sections of the unit:

(chart available in print form)

Whether we are trying to teach calculus or creative writing, the imagination of the student (as well as our own for that matter) needs to be engaged. In order for that to happen, a fair amount of trust has to be established between student and teacher as well as between the student and his or her classmates. Respect lays the foundation upon which trust is built. If students are shutting down in anger or embarrassment, their trust has been thwarted. For some, that trust has been betrayed for a long time.

Most of us have probably experienced disrespect from a teacher or other person in authority, which could have been as blatant as a reprimand or as subtle as a raised eyebrow. In either case, the result is usually intimidation to which we may have reciprocated in kind with argumentative or angry remarks. Even worse, we may have retreated altogether. What we learn from such experiences is usually to keep our mouths shut, and for some, to be combative enough so that we won't have to listen to anyone and no one will bother us. Needless to say, disrespect - among children of all ages - inhibits communication and can put a stranglehold on the creative process.

In any learning experience, students are expected to take risks; the risks inherent in the possibility of failure. However, failure is punished in education and most students, unlike Hester Prynne in Nathaniel Hawthorne's classic, *The Scarlet Letter*, are not so willing to masterfully embroider their failures and walk around with decorative Fs on their shirts. But why not? If they're not making mistakes, are they learning? If they are only able to regurgitate the information assigned by teachers, how useful will it be? Well, I suppose such a student could grow up to be an award-winning contestant on a popular television show such as, *Millionaire*. But is that the the measure of success we strive for in our classrooms?

As a creative writing teacher in the arts program, at an arts magnet high school, I have the luxury of of being a flake. I have tremendous flexibility in designing curriculum and I am not inundated by standardized testing. My class size is generally small, which allows ample time to work with students on an individual basis. Although I'm expected to grade students, given the nature of my discipline, my criteria are fairly subjective. And since editing is a key function of my job, there's little reason for any student not to arrive at the end of a project without an A, and an A that he or she truly earned and can feel a sense of accomplishment from. While there are often many "failures" or mistakes leading up to that A, they are no longer considered degrading, but

simply a necessary part of the process.

I actually encourage my students to make mistakes. When students balk at this idea - since for most of their school life they've been punished or put down for it - I remind them about one of their earliest lessons in life: learning how to walk. For most of us, we began attempting our first steps by pulling ourselves upright against a chair or coffee table. A grownup would tower over us and take our hands and guide our legs and feet to make the motions of walking. Our hands would be let go and we would venture forth on our own, but usually not without falling down. This activity would be repeated over time and eventually we would be walking. What I point out to students is that during this process, the grownups helping us didn't get upset if we made a mistake and fell down. They didn't give us Fs; they didn't say, "Oh, you stupid baby, you can't even walk!" We could probably argue or discuss the meaning of life ad infinitum, but one thing we can know is that life is a learning process. And just like learning how to walk, mistakes and failures are part of it. What we do with these mistakes is the important thing. We have a choice: We can let them continue to hurt us or we can embrace them as opportunities to learn.

Like parents teaching their toddlers to walk, a safe environment needs to be put in place in which students feel secure. We don't need pillows on the floor, but students do need some cushioning for their egos. For the arts student - theatre, dance, music, visual arts, creative writing - that means lots of cushioning. After all, what I'm asking of my students is pretty cheeky. I'm asking them to share their hearts-and-souls, and create some prose or poetry that will be meaningful, evocative, provocative, humorous, tragic, etc.; then hand it over to me so that I can tell them what they did wrong and how to fix it. It's not just fill in the blanks or multiple choice. There's a lot more risk taking involved. Therefore, a nurturing environment in which creativity is fostered through respectful consideration between the teacher and students builds trust, which in turn encourages the kind of risk taking necessary to learn a creative process, such as writing poetry.

## Journal Writing

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Poetry is a personal journey. René Descartes, the seventeenth century philosopher, said, "I think, therefore I am." The poet could just as well say, "I think, therefore I write." Or moreover, "I am, therefore I write." As Jeff Mock suggests in his book, *You Can Write Poetry*, "That's the key: making art of what you do . . . Poetry is the way I've chosen, or perhaps poetry chose me." (p. 12) Following Mock's advice, students will keep journals to record: "ideas, sights, lines of poems, possible titles, strange words, words of advice, words of wisdom," along with anything else that captures their attention and most especially, their expressions of their feelings. Journals will be used throughout the unit to include warmup writing exercises as well as "prewriting" (brainstorming-style writing to be done before working on a poetic form).

## Evaluation

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Students are given checklists for each project that they do, which they are to mark off. I also have such lists recorded in my grade book. I will compare notes with my students intermittently during projects. A large part of students' evaluations has to do with completing each part of the process to the best of their abilities. If a student is absent for a class, he or she can schedule time with me after school or during a lunch break or free period. At the end of a project, I spend time with each student to review his or her progress. LOOKING AGAIN

## Respect

Students are often instructed to be respectful, chided for not being respectful, and judged by how respectfully they behave. Respect is a word they hear very early on in their education, but is it one that they truly understand? And is it a word that for the most part describes how they are treated? The word, "respect" comes from the Latin roots: re (again) and specere (to look). So we could say that respect means to look again. And in essence, that's what respect is all about: not casting an immediate judgment based on initial experience, but looking again, and perhaps seeing with better eyes. When I taught middle school, I used to demonstrate this concept by acting out a little scene for the class. After reviewing the definition for "respect," I would ask for a volunteer. When I told the children that the volunteer would be expected to bump into me as if I was being pushed, I had lots of takers. (So much for respect. Like Rodney Dangerfield, I wasn't getting any.) The scene was simple. My partner and I pretended that we were two students (of course one of us was) walking towards each other in the school hallway. As my partner passed by me, he or she bumped into me to which I reacted. On the first pass, I reacted angrily, threatening to retaliate against the shove. Then I froze (stopped) the scene and addressed the class by asking students what they thought of my reaction. Did I think about what had just happened? Did I have any concern for the person who had bumped into me? Was my reaction appropriate? What did I use to see what was happening? Often students would feel that I was justified in being angry and that I should have fought back or said something unpleasant. But they also realized that I had reacted without much thought; that I simply saw and felt what happened. I had looked only once.

My partner and I repeated the action of the two students walking towards each other in the hallway. This time, when my partner bumped into me, I continued walking and made a grumpy remark under my breath: "Jeeze, who does she think she is?" I froze the scene and again asked students for their opinions on how I reacted in this second pass. They agreed that I still acted angrily, but I didn't try to start a fight. I actually used more than my senses of sight and touch. I had thought a little bit. We decided that I had looked again with my mind and we called that kind of looking again, "perception."

On the third and final pass, I reacted kindly. I asked my partner if she was all right, was anything wrong? Then I froze the scene. Most students agreed that this kind of benevolence probably wouldn't happen in school, but they understood the concept of looking again; of taking some time to think, and maybe even a little more time to care. This last kind of looking again was heartfelt and we called it "vision."

While I doubt this lesson had any real effect on hallway behavior, which to my mind is preplanned chaos with 500 or more students racing between classes to the sound of ear-piercing bells, it did introduce students to a workable definition of "respect." It was no longer an abstract concept. One could actually practice it like an exercise. All you had to do was look again. And, if you got really good at it, you could become perceptive, even visionary.

The pushing scene (above) was designed for middle school children and probably wouldn't work very well for high schoolers. However, a variation on that theme could be an argument scene wherein two students are engaged in a dispute over a heart throb (not an uncommon problem for teenagers). The objective of the scene could be turning argument into conversation and conversation into compassion and understanding. Again, respect becomes a method for settling disagreements by looking again, and again. And if we are to place our efforts largely in looking, listening becomes a natural byproduct.

"Respect" Lesson Plan Outline (two 40-minute sessions): Warmup

- Play Aretha Franklin's Respect as students enter the classroom and settle into their seats;
- Write the letters R , E , S, P, E, C, T vertically (one letter under the other) on the chalk board;
- Work with the class to write an acrostic poem (one phrase or word for each letter), eg.,

Reason is the  
Energy that lets the  
Soul sing, the heart  
Perceive, the mind know that  
Everything shares a divine  
Connection, a  
Truth

### Defining "Respect"

- Review the definition of the word, respect, breaking it down to its Latin roots - re (again) + specere (to look) = to look again;
- Discuss the differences and similarities between observation, perception, and vision and how these ideas apply to the concept of respect;
- Discuss the kinds of conflicts that sometimes arise in school, at home, with friends, etc. Write these ideas on the chalk board.

### Dialogue Writing

- Have students choose partners to improvise a scene with. (Students can work in pairs or groups of three);
- Have each pair or group pick a conflict to work with (each pair or group should have a different conflict idea);
- Instruct students to write dialogue that addresses the conflict in three different ways: 1) reacting to observation; 2) taking some time to think and respond; 3) viewing the situation

through the other person/s eyes, thoughts, and feelings;

- Have students share and discuss their dialogues: Are they realistic? Do they illustrate the concept of respect whether or not the outcome was positive or negative?

## "On Children"

For me, the most dynamic words that I have ever seen about the concept of respect, especially with regard to children, came from a book that I read when I was about fifteen years old. Like many teenagers, I was pretty disillusioned with authority - teachers, parents, politicians, just about anyone grown up enough to file a tax return. Then one day, a friend of mine shared some words of wisdom with me: "Your children are not your children, they are the sons and daughters of life's longing for itself." Imagine - it was OK to be self-possessed, and the world at large, full of all those regulatory, anal-retentive adults, could, if they knew any better, respect you for it! Those words are from the chapter, "On Children" in Kahlil Gibran's book, *The Prophet*. I have over the years revisited this particular passage many times while raising my own children as well as teaching the children of others.

Through Gibran's words and through his eyes - he is not only the author of *The Prophet*, but its illustrator as well - we are presented with a picture of parenting that is quite beautiful. His drawing for this chapter depicts an archer (representing the divine, God, a higher power or universal force) holding a great bow. The bow is formed by male and female bodies. Behind the archer and bow are circling clouds in back of which we see blackness. These clouds form a kind of surreal bullseye to the unknown, or as Gibran says, "The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, and He bends you [parents] with His might that His arrows [children] may go swift and far."

Throughout the chapter we are guided to be flexible enough to allow our children their own lives. We are told that we can "house their bodies, but not their souls," and that "life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday." While we have a wealth of experience from which to guide them, the future is theirs and should not be hindered by projecting our past failures, nor by promoting our overzealous expectations for their future successes.

At the end of the piece, Gibran lets us know that while the archer loves the arrows, the children, "He also loves the bow that is stable," which presents us with a paradox. As parents - and I would stretch this to mean anyone involved in the care of children - Gibran appears to be asking us to be strong and bendable at the same time. This may seem like a contradictory idea, but if we look to the metaphor of the bow, it begins to make sense. The bow has to be able to withstand the force of its string being drawn back. To do this without snapping in two, the bow also has to have give. This tensile strength allows the arrow being held on the string to be released with optimal energy as it creates balance through resistance and tension, not unlike the kind of discipline we try to adjudicate in the making and breaking of boundaries for our children, either at home or in the classroom. Such discipline uses rules and regulations as guides that will hopefully enhance a child's sense of freedom by engendering a balanced sense of responsibility within him or her as well.

Most any class that I have taught over the past ten years has been introduced to Gibran and his wonderful

words about children. I have done so to let my students know that I personally believe in these words and that they have become a philosophy that I feel best expresses the kind of learning experience that I would like us all to share in: They can learn the past from me; I can learn the future from them. Through sharing our own words and seeing the words of others; together we can use our poet's eye, our mutual respect, and look again to observe, to perceive, and to envision our world.

"On Children" Lesson Plan Outline (three to five 40-minute sessions): "On Children" Reading and Analysis

- Display Kahlil Gibran's archer picture from his book, *The Prophet*. This drawing depicts a man holding a bow. He appears to be surrounded by clouds. The bow he is holding is formed by the figures of a man and a woman curved in an arch. (To show the class this picture, you can pass the book around or enlarge the image onto a screen with an opaque overhead projector);
- Read "On Children" from Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet* to the class;
- Discuss the image that Gibran draws and writes about: Who is the archer? What is the bow? What is the arrow? Why does the archer want his arrows to fly "swift and far?" Why does he love "the bow that is stable?" Write down key words that arrive from students' answers on the chalk board.
- Explain metaphor as a figure of speech:

META (beyond, across, over)

+ PHOREO (to carry, bring, bear)

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= METAPHOR (to carry one thing over to another)

- Explain types of metaphors

one thing carried over to another = metaphor

children are like arrows = simile

children are arrows = metaphorical comparison

children of arrows = (made out of)

Acrostic Writing with Metaphor:

Curriculum Unit 01.03.10

7 of 29

- Students are instructed to pick a word that has to do with the concept of respect (not including the word, respect) for which they will write an acrostic poem;
- They are told to brainstorm or do some stream-of-consciousness writing about the words they've chosen;
- In their brainstorming, they should play with using the various types of metaphors that have been discussed until they arrive upon an image that appeals to them, such as Gibran's image of the archer;
- From this point, they can begin to expand the metaphor and develop their acrostic poems, eg.,

Vortex spiraling    Chocolate like love  
 Inside the brain, a    Appeals and appeases  
 Storm                Releases the cold  
 Is coming, an        Embraces the warmth  
 Ocean swelling  
 Never ending

## POETIC GARDENING

### What's a Weed?

I was sitting in a philosophy class when the question, What's a weed? was posed. At the time, the question didn't really interest me. In fact, I thought it to be a pretty ditsy thing to ask. After all, weren't we trying to unravel the mysteries of the universe? What did I know from weeds? I really didn't engage myself in the discussion of To weed, or not to weed. I wasn't particularly keen on discovering any newfangled, new-age botanical truth. In short, I missed the point. The point was sharpened, however, a week or two later while visiting my mother. It was around Christmas time and my daughter had given her a decorative desk calendar. Each page had a pretty floral border surrounding a sepia-toned photograph, and included a poetic phrase. Flipping through the pages, I came upon this line by James Russell Lowell: "A weed is no more than a flower in disguise, which is seen through at once, if love give a man eyes." The weed controversy - in view of the heated discussion that I had witnessed in the philosophy class - sprouted a new appreciation for my philosophy teacher. Perhaps he wasn't the pontificating goof ball I thought him to be; perhaps the weed thing wasn't such a dumb idea. So, I decided to try it on my senior poetry class. I asked the question, "What's a weed?" hoping that my students would be every bit as bored with the idea as I had been. In that way, I could wow them the way I'd been wowed with the Lowell poem. Ah ha! They'd see how truly brilliant I was! What a teacher! How cool!

No such luck. They were just too smart. They got it right away. They immediately connected the indiscriminate idea of "weed" with the concept of prejudice. And, they had fun doing it. We even got a little silly and designed "Save the Weeds" posters. My favorite slogan by one student read: "Weeds don't kill, humans do!"



Another by my most irreverent student said: "If you save the weed today, you can smoke it tomorrow." Needless to say, we had a few laughs. Whoever said that philosophy always has to be serious?

According to the dictionary, a weed is an undesirable, unattractive, or troublesome plant, or something useless or worthless. Basically, the definition of weed is a value judgment. Dandelions are considered weeds. Yet they're not necessarily unattractive, and if one enjoys the nectar of Dandelion wine or the flavor of dandelion leaves in a salad, then they're not exactly useless either. Therefore, the philosophical question of the weed challenges the concept of value; mainly how value is perceived. In Lowell's statement, love is the perceptive pathway through which value is arrived at.

"What's a Weed?" Lesson Plan Outline (two 40-minute sessions):

### Warmup

- Write the question What is a Weed? on the chalk board;
- List answers given by the class on the chalk board;
- Give the dictionary definition of weed as an undesirable, unattractive, or troublesome plant, or something useless or worthless and ask students if they agree with this definition - How might it be true? How might it be false? Add their answers to the list on the chalk board;
- Hand out pictures (untitled) of weeds and flowers (from the internet or a gardening book); ask each student to decide whether the pictures represent weeds or flowers;
- Let students know whether their assumptions were correct or false according to the reference source the pictures were taken from;
- Reiterate the question What is a Weed? and ask students if there truly exists a definitive answer to this question;
- Write the line by James Russell Lowell on the chalk board: A weed is no more than a flower in disguise, which is seen through at once, if love give a man eyes;
- Discuss the ideas about conflicts and respect that were covered in the first lesson in relation to this quote: How can two different ideas represent the same thing, such as weed and flower? How does Lowell's phrase demonstrate the concept of respect and looking again? What's the metaphor? (A weed is a flower.)

### List Poem Writing

- Using the information on the chalk board (descriptions, assumptions, the Lowell phrase), ask students to write a list of short phrases that describe the negative and positive aspects of a

particular weed or flower (selected from the pictures presented in the warmup);

- Instruct students to write their phrases as a kind of shopping list of descriptions, with each line containing only a few words, i.e., one to four words per line;
- Explain that a line can be enjambed or wrapped round to the next line, i.e., a complete phrase does not have to appear on one line;
- Have students use a few lines at the end of their lists of pluses and minuses to make a closing statement about their overall feelings concerning their subjects;
- Have students share their work; explain that they have written in the List poetic form.

## Odes of the Ordinary

The Lowell poem (discussed above) is soft, sentimental, even poignant. In one thought, he expresses a paradox of value. If we practice what we have learned in the first lesson on Respect, we can look again and learn that the undesirable weed can also be seen as a flower. If we look again with love, we can see through the disguise of prejudice. The poet, Pablo Neruda, has seen through many disguises and has taken many a second look at things most of us might think quite ordinary. Artichokes, watermelons, bees, even salt have been exalted to aesthetic heights as they have been envisioned through Neruda's poetic eye. The onion becomes "clear as a planet, and destined to shine." When cut, "there arises the only tear without sorrow." The tomato "has its own light, a benign majesty" and is also viewed by Neruda as a kind of constellation, a "fertile star" paradoxically hot and cool. There is an expansive quality to these odes of the ordinary expressed by Neruda in words similar to the quality Georgia O'Keeffe expressed about sundry subjects in paint. O'Keeffe often monumentalized flowers by zoning in on a particular aspect - portions of petals and stamens - then rendering such in broad strokes upon canvas, giving the viewer an abstract view of the subject's metaphorical nature. In her painting, *Jack-in-the Pulpit IV* (one in a series of paintings dedicated to this wildflower), we see a nearly symmetrical view of inner portions of the flower's petals. Our focus is immediately drawn to its center shape (which in the real-life version of this flower resembles a minister standing in a pulpit). O'Keeffe abstracts this shape, creating a halo-effect by outlining the dark blue-black "pulpit" with white and lavender brush strokes that appear to radiate. The "jack" is painted a flat white, which adds a startling central element to the painting and in contrast to the much darker background colors, resembles an eternal flame.

Neruda, in similar fashion, slices a tomato and finds a star or peels an onion to reveal a luminous planet. Mundane subjects such as flowers and vegetables, however pretty or nourishing we may think of them, become animated and take on lives of their own. Beyond this poetic gardening, Neruda also includes clothing, books, even socks to his repertoire of odes. In "Ode to My Socks," Neruda watches his wool-adorned feet metamorphose into fish, blackbirds, cannons, and eventually "firemen unworthy of that embroidered fire" that had been a gift of hand-made socks. In the end, he considers himself twice blessed "when it's a matter of two woolen socks." (The Neruda odes noted in this section can be found in *Full Woman, Fleshly Apple, Hot Moon*, translated by Stephen Mitchell.)

Both Neruda and O'Keeffe have given tribute to the simplest of things and in so doing have shared something sublime. Interestingly enough they have done so in rather simplistic ways. You won't find a lot of detail in

O'Keeffe's paintings, nor will you find a lot of ten-dollar words or classical prosody in Neruda's writing. There's a stream-of-consciousness quality to both, a poetic zen. Neruda's odes often seem somewhat like a shopping list or notations in a diary. You read them vertically rather than horizontally. The line length is usually short, often one to three words per line, which sets a rapid pace and gives a sense of spontaneity, immediacy. The poetry is happening now.

Traditionally, the ode is a lyric of considerable length based on a particular theme or subject to which it gives tribute. Neruda's odes are free-form as they do not follow stanza patterns. In this regard, we find his work in good company along with Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" and Allen Ginsberg's "Howl," which also do not follow a prescribed pattern of word smithing. As mentioned above, Neruda's odes read like list poems. They also are like haiku in that the poetic form puts us in the moment. One could even convert a Neruda ode into a few haikus by making a list of phrases, chopping off their abstract terms and metaphors, and reworking them into haiku form, such as the two samples below dissected from "Ode to the Seagull":

you peck, you eat, you      seagull and shining  
scout for rotten tomatoes    boat, two wings wind sweeps the sky  
scatter your birdseed        you screech in the rain

Unlike haiku, Neruda's odes draw complex and varied metaphors (and needless to say, extend far beyond a few lines). A seagull becomes a "feathered magnolia" and a "triangle that the air holds up." He even talks to the seagull, apologizes that his tribute has gone on too long and should stop, but that he is "a poet of reality" and so continues on for many more lines speaking to the less glorified aspects of being a seagull; its devouring nature and high-pitched screech like the bark of "a poor man's dog."

In the end, having explored the grace and voraciousness of the seagull, Neruda realizes his own "clumsy attempt at flight" in the words he has written. As with most of his odes, Neruda's meditations lead to this kind of personal realization. He addresses the yin and yang (or polar opposites) of the subjects about which he is writing and attempts to set a balance in his concluding stanzas.

"Odes of the Ordinary" Lesson Plan Outline (eight to ten 40-minute sessions)

#### Warmup

- Play selections from Fiesta by B-Tribe as students enter the classroom and settle into their seats;
- Instruct students to listen to the music and imagine scenarios or objects that the music brings to mind, and jot down these visualizations in their journals;
- Ask students to share their visualizations;
- Contrast and compare the visualizations for their similarities and differences, taking note of the variety of thought given to a single song and that there are often many ways to look at one particular thing.

## "Ode to the Seagull" by Pablo Neruda

- Ask the class to describe a seagull. Use a reference source, such as an encyclopedia or pictorial dictionary to back up or revise their descriptions;
- Read Pablo Neruda's "Ode to the Seagull" to the class;
- Have students take turns to re-read the poem aloud with each reader taking a few lines;
- After each turn at reading a few lines, ask the class to use their poet's eye and look for concrete and abstract terms, i.e., concrete - the real stuff we know through our senses, and abstract - the real or unreal stuff we know through our thoughts and feelings;
- After this reading is finished, instruct students to go through the poem again individually and circle as many metaphors as they can find;
- Discuss their findings as well as how the metaphors are constructed and how they effect the reader emotionally: What is Neruda trying to tell us about the seagull? Why is he telling us about it? Do you - or can you - think about a seagull differently now than when we first described it?

## Ode Writing

- Display a print of Georgia O'Keeffe's Jack in the Pulpit IV;
- Describe O'Keeffe's style of painting (abstract; monumentalism);
- Ask students to give concrete details about the flower and then write them in a list on the chalk board;
- Next, ask students to meditate on the details: Look again to see what the details remind you of? Write each idea next to its respective detail;
- Reiterate what has become our formula for respect: observation, perception, and vision - looks like; similar to; what it could be; if it was that thing, what would it do? What feelings or emotions does it engender?
- Instruct students to use the ideas on the chalk board to write list poems using metaphors constructed from the details they have given;
- Have students share their work;
- Ask students to go back to their List poems and personalize them by adding in their own feelings, their praise, even their criticisms of the the jack in the pulpit;
- Have students share their revised poems and explain the Ode poetic form.

## What's a Rose?

After we have toiled in our poetic garden for a while, we will shift our attention to the rose and begin to cultivate our understanding of respect - looking again - even further through a reading of "Red Rose" from Luke Chan's novella, *Secrets of the Tai Chi Circle*. I began practicing Tai Chi Chuan a few years ago. It is a martial art that originated in China centuries ago. Sans aristocratic weaponry, farmers learned to use their minds and bodies as well as elemental objects, such as sticks and everyday tools, to defend their lands against marauding bandits. Although Tai Chi began as the poor man's combat, and is still considered a martial art, it evolved over time into a health-oriented discipline designed to enhance the flow of energy or chi within the body. Through graceful, undulating movement, the body conducts energy fluidly, cresting and falling like waves in water. Muscles become very relaxed, thus releasing tension throughout. The meditative state of a Tai Chi player (student/practitioner) can be lulled by the activity to a state of mind similar to the peace an infant might feel when being gently cradled.

In the *Secrets of the Tai Chi Circle*, our protagonist, Yee, is given an unusual gift by his mother on his nineteenth birthday - a half-round of a cracked plate, a family heirloom that had been handed down to the eldest son in his family line for generations. It had originally been designed by a great scholar and general who had developed a martial art and a way of life. The designs on the plate had been fashioned to represent a pathway to enlightenment. Having lost favor with the Emperor due to slander against him, Yee's ancestor changed his name and fled the Imperial Court, leaving behind the cracked half of the plate, which would become his legacy. Over many years the plate had been presented to the eldest son in each successive family from his own son's passing into adulthood to Yee's nineteenth birthday. With this gift, each recipient embarked on a mission to discover the other half of the plate whereupon he hoped to find a disciple of his ancestor and become a student of his pathway to enlightenment. Up until Yee's generation, the legacy had not been fulfilled. After a year of searching, Yee finally met up with the Grandmaster, the disciple in possession of the other half of the plate, and so began his tutelage in the art of Tai Chi Chuan.

*Secrets of the Tai Chi Circle* largely addresses the philosophical nature of the discipline, which is based on the teachings of Lao Tzu as recorded in the *Tao Teh Ching*. As the father of Taoism, Lao Tzu introduced a religious philosophy that spoke to the nature of all things having emanated from a single source, the "Tao" - "The Tao begot one. One begot two. Two begot three. And the three begot the ten thousand things." In Taoist philosophy, judgments of right and wrong, good or bad, are transcended to ideas of oppositional forces, i.e., yin and yang. The overall objective then becomes the achievement of harmony and balance within these forces. Physically, we can understand this kind of balance in the structure of an atom with its negatively charged electrons and positively charged protons. Metaphorically, we get a glimpse of it in the words of Kahlil Gibran (mentioned in the first lesson, "Respect") as he offers us a paradox for parenting in that flexibility will foster stability. The question of the weed in the lesson above also lends itself to Taoist philosophy as we cast off our preconceptions to understand its value, much as Neruda's odes strike at the essential quality of his subjects.

In chapter six, "Red Rose," we find Yee despondent over his lack of agility in executing a particular move. He is afraid of failing. Grandmaster advises him to seek out "the old cripple" in the Village of the Beauties, which is also the town from which Lotus, Grandmaster's granddaughter (with whom Yee has fallen in love) is from. Yee visits Mr. Old Cripple and learns a life lesson as he listens to his remarkable story.

When Mr. Old Cripple was a boy, he suffered a riding accident, which crippled his leg. His life became increasingly difficult as he grew up. Childhood friends shunned him; he was let go from his shopkeeping job and was forced to accept the lowliest occupation there was, buffalo herding. When he came of age, his mother

tried to arrange his marriage to the ugliest spinster in the village for which she was met with cries of outrage from the woman's mother. And so, as time went on, the crippling of the young man's leg had spread to his soul, until one day he came upon an old man sitting in the field where he was herding his buffalo. After hearing the young man's tale of woe, the old man advised him, ". . . believe in yourself and know that you are heavenly born to be useful. Live one day at a time and have faith that every tragedy is a blessing in disguise, for everything happens with a purpose." (p. 85) From then on, the young man took pride in his work and became a master at breeding the finest buffalo. When war broke out and all the men of the village were sent off to fight, he was left behind due to his crippled leg. When it became known that all the men had died in battle, he became the most eligible bachelor in town and eventually married many of the prettiest women. Given their dowries, along with his highly successful buffalo breeding business, he became a wealthy man and the prodigious father of many children, among them, the most beautiful girls. Thus his home became known as the Village of the Beauties.

Yee returned home to Grandmaster and Lotus with renewed faith in his ability and an understanding that failures could be blessings in disguise. However, his faith was immediately challenged when he saw Lotus crying. She had been caught cheating on a poetry exam at school and had received a failing grade. She tried to explain to Yee that she had not meant to cheat, but had glanced at another student's paper in order to jar her memory. Instead of showing her compassion, Yee became self-righteous and snapped at her, and she ran away. Initially, he couldn't understand Lotus' reaction. As he thought more about it, he realized that he, too, had made similar mistakes; that he loved Lotus and that that meant loving not only her successes, but her failures as well. He remembered that there was a beautiful rose in the garden and went to get it for her. When he got to the garden, the rose was gone, but Lotus was there. She asked him if he was looking for some thorns and then handed him the rose and said, "Here, but it comes with thorns." (p. 90)

In the opening pages of this unit, I spoke about the importance of making mistakes and risk-taking. I gave an example of a toddler learning how to walk and the need to create a safe environment. Once a secure and nurturing space has been established, the next objective is achieving balance. How do students get their balance in writing? How do failures become blessings in disguise? How do we use our poet's eye to explore the paradoxical nature of ordinary things and mundane concepts to arrive at their essence?

"What's a Rose?" Lesson Plan Outline (eight to ten 40-minute sessions):

#### Warmup

- Write the following questions on the chalk board:
  - Is the weed troublesome or useful?
  - Is the weed troublesome AND useful?
  - Is a rose soft or sharp?
  - Is a rose soft AND sharp?
- Ask students to think about these questions and jot down their ideas in their journals;
- Discuss their answers in relation to T'ai-chi T'u, the leitmotif of traditional Chinese culture.

T'ai-chi T'u T'ai-chi T'u, the name for the diagram above, symbolizes the continuous cycle of movement as it occurs in nature - day and night, season to season, birth, death, as well as human emotions and sensations - hunger and satiety, love and hate, and so on. Even though it represents polar opposites in its black and white colorings, the white area and the black area appear to be moving into one another. As Fritjof Capra states in his book, *The Tao of Physics* : ". . . the symmetry is not static. It is a rotational symmetry suggesting very forcefully, a continuous cyclic movement." (p. 106) The black areas of the diagram represent yin and the white areas represent yang - considered the two main forces in nature - some of the characteristics of which are listed here:

yin	yang	yin	yang	
dark	bright	rest		movement
female	male	complex/intuitive	clear/rational	
yielding	firm	receptive	creative	
below (Earth)	above (Heaven)	stillness of the sage	action of the king	

Yin and yang are not entirely separated, however. Each main area holds a small piece of the other. The dots represent seeds of yin and yang, black and white respectively. The idea is that when either the yin force or the yang force reach their highest manifestation, there is still contained within each force a seed of the opposite one. An example of this idea from the "Red Rose" chapter (which the class will read next) is the arrogance Yee displays when Lotus tells him that she had cheated on a poetry exam. He becomes aggressive and self-righteous (yang). He can't seem to understand why Lotus is upset with his response and becomes even more reproachful (extreme yang) at which point he begins to reflect on his own similar past behaviors (a morsel of yin). Eventually his anger cycles round to compassion. This is not to say that yang is bad and yin is good. Neither are considered good nor bad, but simply energies that act upon one another. Yee also goes to the garden to find a special rose to give to Lotus, which involves "creative action," a yang action.

In the martial art of Tai Chi Chuan, "yielding" yin movements and "firm" yang movements can counterbalance one another. Perhaps the most simple way there is of avoiding a punch in the face is to step to the side (yin) so that the fist of the opponent misses its target, but its force (yang) topples him over since there is nothing standing in the way to balance it. Oral Class Reading - "Red Rose" from *Secrets of the Tai Chi Circle*

- Review the above background information on yin and yang;
- Give a summary of the book, *The Tai Chi Circle* (which is detailed in this unit section);
- Explain that Tai Chi Chuan is a Chinese martial art that has become fairly popular in the United States (there is even a commercial for arthritis medicine featuring people practicing Tai Chi on television);
- Have the class do an oral reading of the "Red Rose" chapter with each student taking a few lines to a paragraph of the text;
- Discuss the chapter with regard to its ironic outcome and how it illustrates that failures can be blessings in disguise. Reiterate some of the ideas that had been presented in the introductory pages of this unit, wherein I spoke about learning how to walk, making mistakes and risk-taking;
- Discuss the metaphor of the rose, its beautiful petals and its sharp thorns and that both are part of its nature.



## Paradox Poems

- Define paradox as a statement that seems contradictory, but is true, e.g., Where ever you go, there you are;
- Define oxymoron as an extreme paradox, e.g., bitter sweet or the burn of frost bite;
- Discuss how paradoxes and oxymorons compare to the concepts of yin and yang as polar opposites in a cycle of existence;
- Reviewing some of the subjects that have been covered thus far in the unit, instruct students to elaborate (brainstorm) on the following paradoxes and/or oxymorons and how they might relate to qualities of yin and yang:
  - the bow is bendable and stable; yielding and firm ("On Children" section; Gibran)
  - the weed is a flower; dark and bright ("What's a Weed?" section)
  - the graceful and voracious seagull; female and male ("Odes" section; Neruda)
  - a rose with thorns; rest and movement ("What's a Rose? section; Chan)
- Discuss student brainstorming and instruct students to see if they can come up with more paradoxes that relate to the qualities of yin and yang;
- Instruct students to make lists for all the paradoxes that they came up with;
- Using imagery, metaphor, concrete and abstract terms and oxymoron - the poetic devices that we have covered thus far - ask students to rework their phrases into a list poem of paradoxes, which for our purpose here, we will refer to as Paradox Poems.

Students may wish to use all the phrases that they came up with in the brainstorming part of this activity, or they may have found a new focus in the process and wish to explore that one further.

### Pruning the Garden

I was lucky enough to visit Japan about eleven years ago when I went to Tokyo for my brother's wedding. While I was there I learned Ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arranging, which uses very few flowers to create a dramatic, if not serene, effect. I found the work relaxing and meditative. Nowadays, when my mother comes to visit, she can usually gauge how stressed my life is by the number of Ikebana I have displayed around the house. I have found it to be a very effective way to (as the kids say) "chill." Over the years, I've also found it to be a very effective way to introduce ideas about editing; a kind of "less is more" approach (although I also believe that "more" can be "more," or "even better"). In the less-is-more model, we find in



Japanese poetry the principle of *hosimi*, which is the slenderizing of phrases into concise understatements. According to the classical teachings of Matsuo Basho, the famous Japanese poet (1644-1694): "When one sees an object, one must leave one's subjective concerns with oneself . . . Oneself and object must become a single thing, and from that singleness the poetry issues." ( *The Poet's Dictionary* , William Packard; p. 85.) Once more, we are "looking again," but this time, not from our own perspective. By becoming "a single thing," we are looking from the perspective of the object.

In this section students will be introduced to the Haiku genre, not only to learn the poetic form of haiku, but to gain a clearer understanding about editing in general; pruning our poetic garden. Haiku also engenders critical thinking: weighing values, weeding (you should pardon the expression) out unnecessary clutter; and becoming intimate with our subjects to the degree that we are expressing their essential natures.

Haiku is a staple of middle and high school Language Arts and I suppose in a typically Eurocentric attempt to bring order out of chaos, our language books have managed to adulterate the simplicity of this poetic form with syllabic formula. However, five + seven + five does not necessarily equal haiku. Since the Japanese do not use English as their national language, the seventeen sounds of traditional Japanese haiku do not rhythmically conform to seventeen syllables in English. In other words the phrase "Good morning" in English contains three syllables; in Japanese, "oh-HAH-yoh goh-ZAH-ee-mahs" contains seven. Because haiku is a genre as well as a poetic form, content and language style take precedence over form.

According to *The Teachers & Writers Handbook of Poetic Forms* (p. 80), Haiku evolved out of renga. Renga had become so popular a party game that poets began preparing hokku, or the first three-line introductory stanza of a renga, to bring to parties. Some renga contained as much as 1,000 stanzas. Matsuo Basho felt that many hokku could also stand alone as poems in their own right, and thus haiku came into being. Senryu, a close relative, follows much the same content requirements of haiku; namely that it is devoid of metaphor and speaks to nature. But whereas haiku often links nature to human nature and creates a mood, senryu is solely directed to human nature and most often is represented by short, humorous, if not, sarcastic, verses. The language in both forms is usually direct and to the point.

"Pruning the Garden" Lesson Plan Outline (eight to ten 40-minute sessions):

#### Warmup

- Play selections from Kitaro's Silk Roads as students enter the classroom and settle into their seats;
- Have students sit in a circular fashion either at their desks or on floor pillows. Instruct them to open their journals to a blank page. As they listen to the music, ask them to write three short lines that depict what they imagine the music to be representing;
- Explain the poetic device of stanza - the Italian word for "room" - as a group of lines of poetry separated from another group of lines. In other words, stanza means creating room (stanza breaks) within poems;
- While the music continues, and after each student has completed the stanza writing, have students pass their journals to the right;
- Tell students to look at the stanza that they now have in front of them, skip a line, and then write two more lines that connect to that stanza in some way - conceptually, rhythmically, in agreement with or in contrast to;

- When students are done with this second stanza, instruct them to once again pass the journals to the right;
- Advise students that this process of cooperative writing will continue until each student has his or her journal back. Three-line and two-line stanzas will continue alternatively throughout the exercise. Students should be guided by the music as well as the last stanza written on the page when writing each new stanza. They should be advised to only try to connect with the last written stanza and not try to make sense out of the whole piece;
- When the journals circle back to their original writers, students can share their work and we will discuss this cooperative style of writing as a Japanese poetic form called Renga, which began a thousand years ago in Japan as a party game played after poetry contests and became the frontrunner of a genre of Japanese poetry called Haiku. (The background on Haiku is given above in this section.)

Ikebana - Japanese Flower Arranging In order to give students an idea of the kind of focus and pruning that we will be addressing in transforming our odes into haiku, which will be our next writing activity, I will show them several pictures of Ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arranging, taken from a Japanese calendar, which thanks to Akemi, my sister-in-law, I have plenty of. But I would imagine that pictures of Ikebana could be obtained from the internet or from a book on the subject. I've also seen demonstrations of Ikebana on the Home & Garden cable channel, so there may well be video tapes on this subject as well. Also, thanks to Akemi (or should I say, my brother, Ed, who had the good sense to marry her), I was able to learn this art form at a class given at her parent's flower shop in Tokyo. The main elements of Ikebana include a long stemmed flower called shin, a medium stemmed flower called, soé, and a short stemmed flower called, hikai. The flowers are first cut to their appropriate lengths and then arranged in a container along with some subordinate foliage. Arrangements vary from mostly vertical, to mostly horizontal. The meditative quality employed in the process of working with the flowers is reflected in the final arrangement, which when done well enough, gives one a sense of harmony, balance, and serenity.

Students will create their own Ikebana using silk flowers and foliage. I have also done this exercise with construction paper whereby students drew flowers on color paper and cut, curled, and pasted them on to a flat sheet of construction paper. While the presentation was mostly flat, it was given a three-dimensional feel by curling petals and leaves against the straight edge of a pair of scissors.

In much the same way students will have demonstrated the simplicity of form and balance in their Ikebana work, we will endeavor to edit our written work. The ode offers us a bouquet of ideas about a given subject, whereas haiku speaks to its essence. To show this process more clearly, I will give students the examples that I used above with respect to Neruda's "Ode to the Seagull" ("Odes of the Ordinary" section).

## Haiku Writing

- Students will work with the odes that they wrote in the "Ode Writing" activity. They will prune away the metaphors and abstract terms, leaving a skeleton of ideas constructed of concrete terms that represent what the actual subject is (sensory) and what it is doing (actually);
- From this list of words and phrases, students can meditate further on their subjects and then write haiku;
- When completed, student haikus can be printed and cut to card size to accompany their flower arrangements. Students may keep their creations or give them as gifts.

## "THE TEN THOUSAND THINGS"

### Love

"Once upon a time there was a microbe named Michael. He had lots of friends." So begins Gary Zukav's chapter on "Love" from his *New York Times* bestseller, *Soul Stories* (pp. 223-227). Within the course of reading this chapter, students will be introduced to: Benny, the bug; Terry, the tree; Frank, the forest; Mother Earth; Gail, the galaxy - and - Mary, the molecule; Amy, the atom, and Sarah and Sam, two subatomic particles. Like many fairy tales, myths, and legends, the characters in Zukav's short story are anthropomorphic. They have been personified in order for the reader to share in their world - their universe - however surreal it may seem. But as students will shortly come to understand, this isn't really make-believe. While microbes and bugs do not have names, they are very much a part of our lives, our existence, and the Earth, the atmosphere, the solar system, the galaxy, and the universe we inhabit TOGETHER. In five short pages of simple language, Zukav reminds us how big and how small we are: from our infinitesimal connection in the protosubstance of atomic particles to the majesty of a seemingly infinite universe, born of that protosubstance as well (neither of which can we see or experience through any other of the five senses). Zukav names such awareness of connectedness, love: "When you see that you and Michael, Benny, Frank, Mother Earth, Gail, and everything else that you can see and that you can't see are part of the same picture, your life lights up with love. This kind of connectedness (which we will explore further in the last section of this unit) is also represented by Lao Tzu's quote as mentioned in the "What's a Rose?" section: "The Tao begot one. One begot two. Two begot three. And the three begot the ten thousand things." Tao can be translated as "the Way." Where Zukav is concerned - and I agree with him completely - that way is love.

After a reading of this chapter, students will work with the characters in the story to learn about the poetic devices of personification and apostrophe, which they will use in writing sonnets.

"Love" Lesson Plan Outline (three to five 40-minute sessions): Warmup

- Ask students to write or improvise a conversation between: Michael, the microbe; Benny, the bug; Terry, the tree; Frank, the forest;
- Students can share their work and discuss how these character are connected.

Oral Class Reading, "Love" from *Soul Stories* by Gary Zukav

- Students take turns to share in an oral reading of the chapter;
- Discuss the chapter with regard to its themes of perspective, connectedness, and love, as well as how the characters are given human qualities.

## Personification and Apostrophe

- Introduce personification as giving human characteristics to non-human things;
- Introduce apostrophe as speaking to a character or object or idea; addressing something (a person or otherwise) in a personal manner;
- Read and discuss this quote by Kenneth Koch from *Making Your Own Days*: ". . . both personification and apostrophe help us to resolve our disconnectedness, not only from the natural world . . . but also from the very abstractions we have invented in order to help us understand it and ourselves." (p. 57)

## Personification and Apostrophe Writing

- Brainstorm ideas to describe each character in the "Love" chapter (see "Sonnet Writing with Personification and Apostrophe" below);
- Using personification and apostrophe, write one phrase for each character, e.g., "Benny, the bug" could be described as: Oh fragile scented beast, you bear such burden.

## Sonnet Writing with Personification and Apostrophe

- Introduce the sonnet as a fourteen line poem, which in the Shakespearean tradition that we will use, follows a rhyme scheme of a/b/a/b/c/d/c/d/e/f/e/f; ending in a rhyming couplet, g/g;
- Using the phrases that were written in the activity above on "Personification and Apostrophe Writing," instruct students to write an additional phrase for each character pair, i.e., Michael/Benny, Terry/Frank, Mother Earth/Gail, Mary/Amy;
- Then instruct students to rework these twelve lines to fit the following rhyme scheme:

1 (Michael the microbe) a 7 (Mother Earth) c

2 (Benny the bug)	b 8 (Gail the galaxy)	d
3 (Michael/Benny)	a 9 (Mother/Gail)	e
4 (Terry the tree)	b 10 (Mary the molecule)	f
5 (Frank the Forest)	c 11 (Amy the atom)	e
6 (Terry/Frank)	d 12 (Mary/Amy)	f

- Lastly, instruct students to add two more lines about how they see themselves fitting into their poems. These last two lines should be written in the following rhyme scheme:

13 (You and the Earth) g 14 (You and the Universe) g

After the sonnet writing is finished, students will share their poems. In the process of sharing, students not only get a chance to practice speech, but also to strengthen their listening skills. In critiquing our own work in this exercise, we will be looking at rhyme scheme, the use of end rhymes and how they fit into the overall sense of their lines. We will also look for other poetic devices that we have covered thus far.

### Big Bangs and Soft Echoes

As we saw in the last lesson, atoms, microbes, bugs, trees, forests, et al, can all be thought of as members of a universal family. In the "What's a Rose?" section earlier on in the unit, we explored some ideas about yin and yang and were introduced to a quote from the *Tao Teh Ching* by Lao Tzu: "The Tao begot one. One begot two. Two begot three. And the three begot the ten thousand things." What Lao Tzu calls "one" in this quote, astronomy might just as well call "Ylem," an old English word meaning "matter," which was used by astronomer, George Gamow, in 1948 to label the pinpoint of explosion that initiated the birth of the universe. Fred Hoyle, another astronomer, criticized this idea a couple of years later by calling it "The Big Bang." Arguments notwithstanding, people throughout recorded history have searched for meaning and understanding of their origins by looking to the infinite and the infinitesimal - from "the ten thousand things" to the one. In John C.H. Wu's translation of the *Tao Teh Ching*, number 40, we are told that "The movement of the Tao consists in returning." In the closed universe theory, this idea fits very nicely as it is possible that the universe may continue to expand for many more billions of years. Eventually it will reach a point at which time it will begin to contract back to its initial starting point, Ylem. And, it may very well explode once more! Then, again, we may be living in an open universe that will continue to expand for billions of years until all the stars burn out, which will not bring us back to Ylem, but perhaps to nothing, the place just before it.

As Fritjof Capra states in his book, *The Tao of Physics*: ". . . all developments in nature, those in the physical world as well as those of human situations, show cyclic patterns of coming and going, of expansion and contraction [yin and yang]" (p. 105). In an effort to understand this Taoist principle of returning, I wrote a poem a couple of years ago titled, *Before Ylem, The Place of Returning*. The poem is actually a series of four vignettes, the first one constructed as a cento; a poem composed of lines from other poems. The second part of the poem addresses man's search for understanding the cosmos from Aristotle to Stephen Hawking. The third piece is blatantly arrogant and speaks to religious and mythological ideas that contrast masculine and

feminine energies. The last piece represents my tentative answer to the question posed in the opening cento, which is not so much a revelation as it is a repose. (Before Ylem appears in Appendix A.)

I will present Before Ylem to students to show that poetry can be used as a medium for grappling with complex ideas whether or not it leads us to definitive answers. We will also discuss how the poem works, or doesn't work, to answer the questions it poses, namely, What is before Ylem? What is the place of Returning? as it is stated in the *Tao Teh Ching* .

Students that I have shared this piece with enjoyed the poem mostly because it rhymed, even though a propensity for that very aspect is what I have yet to overcome in my poetry. I sometimes wonder if the inside of my brain is wired for jingles. However, I think it will serve as a good sample to discuss various "echoes" or poetic devices of sound that are used in the poem: The devices are listed in Appendix B, Echoes, and include: euphony, cacophony, alliteration, assonance, consonance, onomatopoeia, true rhyme, slant rhyme, apocopated rhyme, masculine rhyme, feminine rhyme, end rhyme, internal rhyme.

"Big Bangs and Soft Echoes" Lesson Plan Outline (three to five 40-minute sessions): Deciphering Sound • Hand out copies of Before Ylem (Appendix A) and briefly state what the poem is about and how it is constructed (see description above); • Present each of the sound devices in Appendix B to the class; • Ask students to see if they can find an example of each one in the poem (examples from Before Ylem are also given in Appendix B). Cento Writing

- Describe the cento as a poem constructed of lines from existing poetry;
- Take students to the school library (or make poetry books available to them) and ask them to look through several poems (perhaps ten to fifteen or more);
- Supply students with index cards and instruct them to write down individual lines of poetry that appeal to them. Each line should be written on an individual index card, along with the author, title of the book, and the page number;
- After this initial research (which may take a few class sessions), ask students to describe the poetic devices that they have found in their quotation selections;
- Instruct students to arrange their index cards with quotations in an order that is appealing to them. They can think of this process as a kind of puzzle-making;
- Lastly, instruct students to write their centos based on their arrangement of quotes. Also ask them to footnote their poems, listing numbers to represent the lines, followed by the authors, book titles, and page numbers that each line came from.

## Energy

The "ten thousand things" that metaphorically comprise all of existence can be reduced to three, then two, then one and even none - or the nameless Tao - as Lao Tzu tells us. Even though Tao can be translated as "The Way," it is considered nameless and can only be spoken of metaphorically or intuitively. It defies reason

and logic. In the John C. H. Wu translation of the *Tao Teh Ching* , number 14, we are instructed to "Look at it but you cannot see it! Its name is Formless. Listen to it but you cannot hear it! Its name is Soundless. Grasp it but you cannot get it! Its name is Incorporeal." Such concepts are difficult to understand in the practical world that we negotiate through our five senses. Yet, things aren't always as they seem. We no longer look at the horizon and see the edge of the world. Turned out, it wasn't flat after all. At first glance, the formless, soundless, incorporeal Tao may appear to be yet another litany of religious thought. However, as Fritjof Capra writes in *The Tao of Physics* : "The Taoists saw all changes in nature as manifestations of the dynamic interplay between the polar opposites yin and yang." (p. 105) So, the Tao that begot one and the one that begot two, begot two as yin and yang; two distinct and contrasting aspects in any given cycle of change (as discussed above in the "What's a Rose?" section). Since all of existence appears to be in motion from the microscopic to the macroscopic, change is evident throughout. Where change seems truly formless, soundless, incorporeal - where matter ceases to exist - we find the subatomic level.

In the 1990 film, *Mindwalk* based on *The Turning Point* (also written by Fritjof Capra), three people in disparate occupations, Jack, a politician (Sam Waterston), Tom, a poet (John Heard) and Sonya, a physicist (Liv Ullman) share an odyssey of intellectual discovery on the island-abbey of Mont St. Michel. Set in this remarkable medieval milieu, these three people, disillusioned with their work, share in heartfelt conversation that brings them out of the dark ages into the light of quantum physics.

In the great cathedral on the island, they find themselves dwarfed by the majesty of its architecture and are reminded of the days when mechanical time did not exist; an era that followed the rhythms of sunrise to sunset, season to season; when judgment day lay just around the corner and in its coming, offered hope, peace, and freedom to the faithful.

The great clock (obviously a later installment at the abbey) triggers an argument between Tom and Sonya regarding the mechanistic view of nature and one of its leading proponents, 17th century philosopher, René Descartes, the primary architect of this view, who saw the clock as a model for the cosmos and man as machine. Once nature could be disassembled into individual parts, it could be understood. Mythology and religion no longer needed to decipher it in mystical ways. Logic and reason could be called upon to understand all of existence. With the advent of Isaac Newton's laws of motion, the world could know everything it needed to know. What the world forgot or failed to recognize was that the cosmos could also be viewed as a living organism, much more than the sum of its parts.

Sonya points out that the massive pendulum of the clock can now be replaced by a quartz crystal; the hand-forged reels and gears replaced by a microchip the size of a thumbnail. Even so, the world still thinks mechanistically. She cites the example of national debts incurred by third world countries who must let their children starve and cut down their rainforests in order to pay them. As the world clock ticks, forty thousand children in Brazil die each day and the country loses "one football field of rainforest every second." Yet, overpopulation increases in third world countries, and global warming continues throughout. The mechanistic view breaks down here in that problems such as these cannot be solved in isolation like clockworks; and, we are running out of time. Sonya goes on to say that, "All problems are fragments of a crisis of perception."

At this point in the film, Tom offers a quote from William Blake: "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear as it is, infinite." While Newtonian physics seems to work fine in the practical or macroscopic world, it doesn't work at the subatomic level where things are not so visible. To give the invisible some perspective of scale, Sonya enlarges the idea of an atom to the size of the island of Mont St. Michel wherein the nucleus would be the size of a small pebble and electrons would still be invisible. Hence, the



greatest aspect of an atom is space, lots of it, so much so that matter doesn't exist at the subatomic level. The grammar school text book description of the atom - the one that most of us are familiar with - shows it as a miniaturized version of the solar system with a sun-like nucleus and planet-like electrons orbiting it. However, electrons don't orbit, nor do they appear to move from point A to point B. As Sonya says, "subatomic particles show tendencies that we call 'probabilities.' They manifest in probability patterns or shells." Then the question becomes: Why does matter appear solid, such as the matter in a stone wall? The answer: Because probability shells are hard to compress.

With regard to the problems of Jack, Tom, and Sonya, who each see themselves not fitting with the world anymore, the elusive atom is no longer a building block of the universe, but a metaphor for it. As the subatomic level illustrates that there are no real boundaries, then existence, itself, becomes a seemingly infinite matrix of "probabilities of interconnections; one inseparable web of relationships."

#### "Energy" Lesson Plan Outline (eight to ten 40-minute sessions) Warmup

Students are instructed to write a list of the following phrases and fill in the blanks with lies or the most ridiculous ideas they can imagine: Energy is a \_\_\_ / Energy looks like \_\_\_ / Energy sounds like \_\_\_ / Energy tastes like \_\_\_ / Energy smells like \_\_\_ / Energy feels like \_\_\_ / Energy moves like \_\_\_ / Energy thinks like \_\_\_

#### Mindwalk - Video Viewing

- After sharing the students' nonsensical ideas about energy, define matter as something physical that occupies space; and energy as the power to move matter or to do work;
- Define physics as: The science of matter and energy and how they interact - the study of sound and light; the study of mechanics or how things move; the study of heat and cold; the study of electricity and magnetism; the study of atoms and subatomic particles;
- Introduce *Mindwalk* as a film that talks a lot about matter and energy, but in a very different way than most of us are used to. The way the film describes physics seems more like poetry than it does science;
- As the film plays, stop intermittently when students have questions or wish to discuss some aspect.

#### Wu Li Writing Activity

- students to look at their warmup writing about energy and ask how they feel now about their lies and ridiculous phrases in terms of "probabilities of interconnections" and the universe as "one inseparable web of relationships." Can they make connections? Can they make sense out of the nonsense?;
- Define the term wu li as the Chinese word for physics, which translates as "patterns of organic energy" - a quote by Al Chung-liang Huang in the book, *The Dancing Wu Li Masters* by Gary Zukav (p. 7; Zukav is also the author of *Soul Stories*, which we used in the "Love" section);



- Instruct students to expand on their "nonsense" energy phrases by taking each phrase and adding two more phrases that express 1) how the nonsensical phrase might actually be true, and 2) how this imagery and idea makes them feel;
- Further define wu li as it is expanded on in *The Dancing Wu Li Masters* to include other Chinese translations of the term, including: "my way, nonsense, I clutch my ideas," and "enlightenment";
- Ask students to look at their writings to see how these other definitions might fit with an overall definition of energy; how their paradoxical statements might lead to a workable understanding of what energy is;
- Ask students to reflect on the quote by Shakespeare (which is used on the first page of this unit) and discuss what comparisons can be made to their work in this activity:

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,  
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;  
And as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation and a name.

- What comparisons can be made to the Blake quote in the film?:

If the doors of perception were cleansed,  
everything would appear as it is, infinite

### Free Verse Writing, or Writer's Choice

- Ask students to review their dialogue pieces, which they wrote in the first lesson of the curriculum unit ("Respect");
- Just as they had generated ideas about every day problems in that exercise, ask them to brainstorm on a more global level. What are some of the world's problems today?;
- From this brainstorming, each student should select a topic to work with;
- Instruct students to look at their topics from a mechanistic view and then look again from the

viewpoint of Systems Theory as it was described in the film - "The essence of life is self organization: self-maintaining; self-renewing; self-transcending";

- Lastly, calling upon the skills we have covered in this unit - observation, perception, vision; poetic devices and forms; as well as the work in student journals - ask students to write poems that address their topics. The poems may be free verse or they may choose other poetic forms.

As mentioned at the beginning of this unit, physics sans mathematics is all about wonder. It is the quality of wonder that this unit has attempted to address. In this regard, we will look for this quality in our class work. What paradoxes and surprises do our poems reveal? Do we see critical thinking in the work? Is it provocative? Do the poems evoke emotion? And most of all, have we truly used our poet's eye to look again, and again?

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## APPENDIX A - Before Ylem, The Place of Returning

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### I. CENTO\*

Heaven is a place where nothing

ever happens

The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn

no traveler returns -

Ubiquitous scintillation? - a wild flower?

Let my heart be still a moment

and this mystery explore

Eternity in an hour

The wonder of something more

\*Byrne/Shakespeare/Yevtashenko & Blake/Poe/Blake/Watson II. Infinite dream splits the night Ten thousand flashing shards of light Swirling, curling primordial stew Then a witch's brew of talking heads Who claimed with crystal clarity The beginning - an evolution for This elusive singularity: On the Heavens Aristotle divined Earth's eternal center - forever and serene As the "First Cause" of The City of God In the prayers of Saint Augustine - Time has a beginning Ptolemy sets it spinning Wheels within wheels within wheels Copernicus' sun takes center stage As clerics bark at his heels Galileo scopes Jupiter's moons Circling its mighty girth Myth loses ground The church dogs howl "The cosmos does not circle the Earth?!!" The Purist notions tainted Much to Kepler's chagrin Perfect circles are out Elliptical orbits, in *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* Arrogant and brilliant - Newton's new galactica Pissed off and promising, a rude initiation But there's an apple for the master of Universal gravitation Spinning clouds gather and bulge Collecting dust in space Nebular Theory reclaims the sun - In the solar plan of Kant and Laplace Relatively speaking The universe gains intensity Isaac rolls over in his grave With Einstein's infinite density A distant past set stars adrift It all expands in Hubble's "Red Shift" Gamow's "Ylem" - marks the spot In the face of Hoyle's hot harangue There is no beginning as this "Big Bang!" Then what's all the noise? speaks the next revelation Penzia and Wilson's "background radiation" More supposition, a brighter clue Hell, its big bang residue! Sucked back to black - Everything goes - The gravity sump pump Of Hawking and Penrose Beyond knowing, a zone so odd Heaven's black hole - A singularity of God III. Physics belies faith There is no knowing - no slide rule to calculate This amorphous dimension Religion belies reason There is no faith - no dogma to fathom This glorious heaven In the beginning there was the word? Then more words to come Equally absurd as here upon this page Before

the beginning? Before Ylem Before some initial rage Set things spinning out of control Before women Before men Before time Even then Before matter Or space Or energy or more Before, before - Before? What trace is left To divine the first cause The prime mover The great I Am Who knows? God's Machiavellian nightmare You suppose? Paradise Lost in the storm of free will What was He thinking? Or still, better yet - What was She thinking? Fickle Gaea A woman's convolutions The true serpent in the Garden of Eden Making ablutions of fire Wrapped around the Tree of Knowledge Giving birth to roots of desire IV. Yet still, in the day to day Far beneath heaven's dome Lies a quiet place free of thought Where sometimes we go home A blissful space past belief That assures we're not alone - The ecstasy of childbirth or A lover's embrace when passion is sated The full belly that hungers no more Or a mourner's memory when grief has abated - Doing without doing A state of being, a state of grace Where the mind is quiet, the body rests pliant And the heart shines through the face Before the beginning Before heaven above Or hell below burning Before Ylem, is the place of love In the stardust of Returning

## APPENDIX A - Echoes

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euphony: sounds combined to flow smoothly

- A state of being, a state of grace

- Where the mind is quiet, the body rests pliant

- And the heart shines through the face

cacophony: sounds combined to dramatically clash

- Infinite dream splits the night

- Ten thousand flashing shards of light

alliteration: repetition of identical consonant sounds - Paradise Lost in the storm of free will assonance:

repetition of identical vowel sounds - Infinite dream splits the night consonance: alliteration times two;

repetition of two or more consonant sounds in words with different vowels sounds - Wrapped around the Tree

of Knowledge onomatopoeia: words that sound like what they are describing - There is no beginning as this

"Big Bang" true rhyme: repetition of identical vowel and consonant sounds with the rhyme appearing in the stressed syllable in polysyllabic words

- Far beneath heaven's dome

- Lies a quiet place free of thought

- Where sometimes we go home

slant rhyme: (near rhyme and off rhyme) rhyming sounds that are similar, but not identical. Alliteration,

assonance and consonance are used to create similar sounds

- Physics belies faith

- There is no knowing - no slide rule to calculate

- This amorphous dimension

- Religion belies reason

- There is no faith - no dogma to fathom

- This glorious heaven

apocopated rhyme: slant rhyme that uses true rhyme sounds with the rhyme falling on a stressed syllable in one word and an unstressed syllable in another

- Let my heart be still a moment

- and this mystery explore

Eternity in an hour

The wonder of something more

masculine rhyme: single syllable rhyming words and stressed last rhyming syllables in polysyllabic words

- A distant past set stars adrift

It all expands in Hubble's "Red Shift"

feminine rhyme: unstressed rhyming syllables in polysyllabic words

- Then what's all the noise? speaks the next revelation

Penzia and Wilson's "background radiation"

end rhyme: rhyming sounds appearing at the end of two or more lines

- A lover's embrace when passion is sated

The full belly that hungers no more

Or a mourner's memory when grief

has abated

internal rhyme: rhyming words that appear in the middle of one or more lines, which can also be matched with an end rhyme, but do not have to be

- In the beginning there was the word?

Then more words to come

Equally absurd as here upon this page

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