



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
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Postwar Poetry in the AP Classroom

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Poetry. What exactly is poetry? Actually, there are no comprehensive definitions of poetry. A good definition for the classroom is words in an enclosed form that call attention to themselves. The difference between poetry and regular speech is that most poetry has more meaning per word than prose. Words of a poem have an extra consciousness about themselves. Because a poem is more concise than prose and measured, every word counts. The words a poet uses are specifically chosen and “on purpose.” Poetry changes the way in which words normally refer to things in order to make us see things in a new way. “Poetry is concerned with the massiveness, the *multidimensional quality*, of experience” (Brooks and Warren 6). Poetry is not simply verse.

I teach at the Sound School in New Haven, Connecticut. Our school is an aquaculture regional center where the students focus on marine life and boating. Students build boats, sail, breed fish and study them, and study environmental effects on the water, among other things. Our students come from about twenty surrounding towns; in fact, some of them take the train for an hour to get here. Most students come because they love the water, and many of them are hands-on learners. Sometimes this makes learning in a traditional class like English a challenge for them. While we make accommodations, we still do try to also focus on traditional literature and composition. We have a varied socioeconomic grouping, as well as a variety of skill-levels, as the students have come from so many different schools and home lives. We are an inner-city school, so we have a lot of the same challenges as other city schools. I’m writing this unit for my AP English Literature and Composition class. Some of the students we get for an AP class would not necessarily qualify for an AP class at a suburban school. We work a great deal on analysis in their thinking, reading, and writing. Usually the class is not greater than 15 students, which affords a good opportunity for one on one conferencing.

Rationale

In Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition, students need to be able to effectively explicate a poem. I find that my students have a harder time with poetry than with prose, because they haven’t been exposed to poetry as much as to prose, and also because poetry is so full of figurative language. On the AP exam, students will have to answer multiple-choice questions that explicate poems, as well as write an essay explicating one or two poems. In the past, my students have done the poorest on the poetry portions of the

exam, which is why I'm writing this unit. I need to find a more effective way to teach poetry.

While there are many critical approaches to literature, the AP exam uses mostly the New Critical method, which emphasizes detailed examination and explication of texts. According to New Criticism, the content and form are completely coherent. There are no accidents in the writing – everything has a function. This method aims at providing a means of explaining the content and providing insights needed to evaluate the artistic quality of the work. In the beginning of the year, I give students examples of New Critical commentaries. We read them together and discuss them. Often students have never seen any literary commentary, so the style and vocabulary are new. We look at not only what is being said, but also how it is said, so they can learn to internalize critical thought. Students need to learn to answer the “so what” of what they notice and think. I do remind students that there are some problems with the New Critical literary theory, especially the argument that poetry is not to be broken apart, because the poem would lose some of its beauty.

Unit Overview

The main text I use in class with the students is Perrine's *Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense*. It has fourteen chapters on poetry, broken down by the dominant poetic techniques used. While I don't teach chapter to chapter, I do use some of the poems in the book as well as the definitions for the various poetic devices. For a new teacher who does not know much about poetry, this is a good starting place. I will also be making copies of poems from online and from *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* and information about poetry from *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* for the students. The latter is also a good source of definitions for poetry terms as well as criticism. This unit will be my introduction to poetry, to be taught within the first two months of school. I will continue to teach poetry throughout the year. Most poems for this unit will be from the Post-War era, but I'm including some poetry from past writers who have influenced current writers. Students need to know writers from each literary period, dating as far back as the anonymous writer of *Beowulf* to modern-day literature, so I will cover a great variety of writers, but not all the writers for the year are in this unit.

I will organize the poems into the following sections (not limited to the poets listed here): Thematically: Confessional Poems by Elizabeth Bishop, W.D. Snodgrass, Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton, and Sylvia Plath; Socio-Political poems by Gwendolyn Brooks, Adrienne Rich, and Philip Larkin. Formal types: Free Verse by Walt Whitman, Gwendolyn Brooks, Seamus Heaney, and William Carlos Williams; Villanelles by Elizabeth Bishop and Dylan Thomas; Sonnets by Shakespeare, Jonson, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Richard Wilbur; and Dramatic Monologues by Tennyson, Browning, and Hollander. Of course, I will help the students acknowledge that many of the poets and poems overlap within these categories. It is important that they do, since poetry does not exist within a vacuum.

Example of Explication

When explicating a poem, a reader must read it several times. In the first reading, the poem is read for overall meaning, for the sound of the poem. After the reader figures out who the speaker is and what the poem is about, s/he can begin explicating the poem to see what devices have been used to create meaning, and how those devices did in fact help create meaning. I continually model explication for students throughout the year, and they begin to explicate in the very beginning of the year. Hopefully by the middle of the year, they are proficient at close readings. For samples of student explication and past AP exam questions, a useful website is www.apcentral.collegeboard.com. Once there, click on exams on the right column and scroll down to released exams. You will get an adobe reader's version of the exam and students' answers receiving various scores. You can also get an explanation of scores for those essays as well as a rubric for the scoring.

For the teacher who has not explicated in a while, teaching this analysis can be intimidating – I know it was for me. But with practice, any teacher can easily teach this. For example, Mary Jo Salter's poem, "Unfinished Painting", from her collection *Unfinished Painting* 1988, uses religious imagery, the theme of death, and a change in voice to show the speaker's view of how we are all unfinished and how art can give us an extended life. This is the first poem I'll do with my students all year. Students seem to understand it easily; yet there's so much in the poem for them to see. A brief background on the poem: Salter wrote this poem about an actual painting done by her mother, who died young and "unfinished."

The first thing I tell the students is that when the poem begins with "Dark son, whose face once shone like this," the son could either be dead or possibly now dark and once innocent as captured in the painting. Salter uses a great deal of alliteration to reinforce the meter, which is sometimes iambic tetrameter. The second stanza separates the unfinished body from the finished head, so the form complements the content. Salter introduces the religious imagery with a simile, comparing the subject to a "choirboy" as well as reinforcing the idea of innocence. The religious imagery is continued into the next stanza with "Rome" and we know the "she" is Salter's mother. In the fourth stanza the word "made" contains more than one meaning. Made can mean constructed as well as birthed. The mother's hope for the boy is shown in the religious imagery evoking the pope. Possibly she is also evoking the innocence of the boy with her religious imagery. Salter continues the observation of the painting while trying to convey the significance of the painting and the motivation of the painter. In the fifth stanza Salter parallels the ability of the painting to immortalize the subject and the painter as her poem does for her mother. Salter alludes to the Brothers Grimm, a children's book – again recalling a time of innocence and simplicity. But we see a change of thought with "wait", because what Salter is saying is that what draws us to art is how it brings us back to our own lives. She's reliving a memory. I can also show students how Elizabeth Bishop uses that same moment of revelation in "Poem," and so does Rachel Hadas in "Homage to Winslow Homer." Salter's sixth stanza reinforces the theme of being unfinished, since the painter spends time raising the real boy instead of finishing the painting of the boy. Art is a means to reflect on life, but life remains more important. The painter keeps life in perspective, which is praised as "(no crime)" which starts the seventh stanza. The poet's use of the words "only" and "child" shows that this child represents all children, and when Salter reverses the syntactical order of the words in the second and third line, she uses chiasmus to draw attention to the universality of the child. We are all a work in progress, which they kids understand and appreciate. Further, Salter shows the transformative power of the painting because the painter "altered" her subject. Again the religious imagery returns with the word "alter" by suggesting a pun on the word meaning the alter in a church. Again, this could imply an innocence about the child or she could be praying for the welfare of her child.

Students should recognize that an important shift begins with the eighth stanza, beginning with ellipses. We now know the son is not dead, but the mother is. The focus of death in the first seven stanzas is on the son, transforming the subject into a still being, but in the last four stanzas the focus of death shifts to the mother. We have a transition of one death to another, from a phantom death to a real death. Salter puns on the word “sun,” which could also mean son. The sun is set because the mother is dead and her eyes reclaim him. Salter again plays on the word “praise” with the mother’s admiration and examination, “appraise.” When in the ninth stanza the son finds the painting and picks it up realizing it’s “lighter” than he anticipated, Salter suggests the weight of the painting is in its meaning. It’s heavy in meaning. Again in the tenth stanza we see religious imagery when the mother creates the son in her own image, as Gd creates man in his own image; yet she is living vicariously through her son’s image, because she was too diffident about her skill to go public. Lastly we hear the mother’s voice through the italicized first line and then the boy answers through his portrait, which can speak and show meaning, even though “still” - as in continued and not moving. Salter ends the poem returning to the notion of dark or “shade[d]”. Salter illustrates the notion that life and art intermingle, because like life, art too is unfinished, changing, and growing.

Most of the time, students are amazed at how much is in a poem, especially if they have not done close readings in the past. Students can figure out some of what I explicated for you. I find they actually notice more than they say, because they don’t trust their own thinking and voice. One of the major goals of AP is for students to truly think for themselves and question the text. Together they can explore the answers. I try to give them space to struggle with analysis, rather than continually spoon-feed them the answers, which is sometimes tempting to do.

Teaching Poetry to Students

When I have the students read poetry at home, I tell them to read the poem three times. Then I have them take notes on the poem, noting the literary devices used, tone, diction, and any other comment worth noting. As students progress they become better observers and readers of poetry. In class, we discuss their notes and questions and begin explication based on what they’ve said. Students are more likely to participate when they have “prepared thinking” to draw from.

For poetic terms, I use the list given out by the Advanced Placement organization. If you go to their website, www.apcentral.collegboard.com, you will find this list. For definitions, you can go to any literary terms guide. Abrams puts out a good guide, which you can get at the NCTE website.

Poetry Categories

The Confessional Poems

Confessional poetry is an intensely emotional, direct approach to autobiographical content in which the poet removes the mask of impersonality and candidly discusses a personal event or issue. The time period of Confessional poetry is said to be from 1955 - 1975, but you can find confessional poetry today. The main

poets of the Confessional School of poetry are W.D. Snodgrass, Robert Lowell, Elizabeth Bishop, Anne Sexton, John Berryman, and Sylvia Plath. All six poets wrote, although not exclusively, poems that “confessed” an autobiographical situation or emotion directly to the reader. Confessional poetry is typically chatty in tone – conversational. Many of the students in my school, when attempting to write poetry, write confessional poetry unaware.

We’ll start with W.D. Snodgrass’s “Heart’s Needle” - the first poem to be coined confessional. This poem was written for his daughter after a divorce. It is ten sections long, so I will abbreviate by using sections 1, 2, and 10 in class. This poem is also great because many of the students’ parents are divorced, and they can relate to the speaker. All of my students know someone who has divorced parents. “Mementos,¹” is also a good confessional poem to teach. This poem is about the speaker finding a picture of his ex-wife while sorting through old files. He is shocked at first, but then begins to reminisce about the good times, “before we got married.” He then decides to keep the picture. It’s a very hopeful poem that has great examples of imagery. This poem also lends itself to teaching how syntax can help create a rhythm and tone.

Next, we’ll study Elizabeth Bishop’s poems, which “thinly conceal her estrangement as a woman, a lesbian, an orphan, a geographical rootless traveler, a frequently hospitalized asthmatic, and a sufferer of depression and alcoholism” (Lensing). We’ll begin by analyzing Bishop’s poem “Sestina,” which might have actually been used on the AP exam. Students will examine the use of “tears” and personification. Students can also look at the relationship between the grandmother and the grandchildren. We will also look at “The Armadillo,” a poem about animals’ suffering due to human use of fire balloons. First, I’ll ask students what the poem is about, always reinforcing the importance of using the text to support answers. Hopefully after an in-depth conversation, students will see that this is told from the voice of a spectator who is overwhelmed by pathos of the undeserved suffering of the animals. According to literary critic Paul Fry, the animals come in like a medieval pageant. There are antisocial gestures here. The last stanza is an apostrophe to the fire, creating a more direct and real experience by the spectator. This poem’s narrative is like the Chicken Little tale where the sky is falling. Students will later read Robert Lowell’s response to this “Skunk Hour.” Students will later be able to see that Bishop’s problems are the mirror inverse of Lowell’s, for she keeps her distance emotionally, and maybe she feels guilty about this because her demons are bottled up. We will also read Bishop’s “Sandpiper.” After students are familiar with her work, they will compare her “At the Fishhouses” with Adrienne Rich’s “Diving into the Wreck” and then read Roger Gilbert’s article doing this, comparing their own thoughts with his. My hope is that the students will feel validated if Gilbert reinforces any of their ideas. They can also see what they may have overlooked. To do this they will create a They Say I Say chart (see lesson plans).

Robert Lowell’s work from 1959 on was confessional. We’ll start with his answer to Bishop’s “Armadillo” – “Skunk Hour”. Robert Lowell was a manic-depressive whose depression would become severe around Christmas, when he was often hospitalized. He had profound religious and moral guilt, so his poems are confessional, as if he’s going to a priest to whom he tells everything bad about himself. I tell the kids the autobiographical information, because in Lowell’s case, we can really understand his poetry better. Lowell feels miserable about his compulsion when he “...watched for love-cars. Lights turned down,/ they lay together, hull to hull,/ where the graveyard shelves on the town.../ My mind’s not right.” Students should know that Lowell’s testing the boundaries of propriety of what we tell the world about ourselves. In the following stanza, students will see that he has a great deal of self-pity. They will not see, but I’ll tell them that “I myself am hell” is from a speech of Satan’s in *Paradise Lost*. He says he’s empty in that last line. The skunk shows us an alternate model of what it’s like to be in the world. Lowell does an excellent job making the personification plausibly human and retaining its original animal nature. The skunk is eating and doesn’t care

that Lowell is there. Its way of being self-absorbed is harmless and honorable, as opposed to Lowell's. Students should clearly see that the skunk that is determined to live on; it doesn't torment itself with self-pity, unlike Lowell. The personification of the animal is a self-transcendence to realize the skunk's spirit in the face of adversity is tougher than that of the self-absorbed poet. Students will then look at both "The Armadillo" and "Skunk Hour" and compare and contrast them in an in-class essay. Lowell says in his essay on "Skunk Hour" that both poems "use short line stanzas, start with drifting description and end with a single animal" (Parkinson). We'll continue on with "Home After Three Months Away," which is an account of returning home after being sick. Then we will look at a more political poem, "For the Union Dead" about the Civil War, which is a great poem to focus on for tone. According to Brooks and Warren, the Latin epigraph can mean, "They gave up everything to serve the republic" (157). The poet criticizes modern America, and students will decide what the tone of the poem is. We will also look at Lowell's use of the two mementos of war.

Anne Sexton's confessional poetry is more political at times. She was highly criticized for writing about feminist and gynecological subject matters. She suffered numerous emotional breakdowns, due to postpartum depression. In fact, she tried to commit suicide and then later in her life did commit suicide. We see her emotional struggle in her poems. Students often write of their emotional struggles in their poetry. She also writes of the struggles to conform to society's view of women. We'll start with "Double Image" and then look at "Her Kind". We'll finish with "The Abortion". If we have time we will also read "For My Lover, Returning to his Wife." Besides simply analyzing the author's craft, students can discuss the themes in these poems and see if they are still current.

John Berryman's "The Dream Songs" has many parts to it, and I will teach 1 and 40. 1 is about Henry, the protagonist of these poems, and the students may have trouble understanding what this poem means. 40 is a great example of the creative syntax. Berryman rearranges the order of sentences and even leaves out some words. Berryman uses spacing in both parts uniquely. He'll insert multiple spaces in between words.

Anne Sexton inspired Sylvia Plath. Plath's "Daddy" is an attack on her father, comparing him to a Nazi. I'll start with the ethical question of what kinds of cards are being played if the object of hatred is being Naziized. With what degree of irony do we need to compare a person to probably one of world's greatest, if not the greatest, tragedies? I'm sure students will feel strongly about this. We can also look at Seinfeld's "The Soup Nazi" and other such sayings. I'll give students background so they can see that this is a self-exorcism of demons. Some older poetry, as can be read in Brooks and Warren's *Understanding Poetry*, came in the form of incantatory exorcism, getting rid of a spell or curse in order to free oneself of the offense and of the ambivalence of the situation. Plath is going against the Golden Rule; she is clearly saying what is not nice. After reading the poem a number of times and discussing it, we'll see how Plath's tone allows us to see the irony of comparing great things and small, and we'll look at the ethical project of liberating ourselves from that evil that goes unrecognized because of societal standard (loyalty to family). Further, students will recognize how terrific Plath is with the hard "a" sound, as in the word "Daddy." The abrasiveness of the hard "a" cultivates the harshness of what could be mellow. A lot of anger comes through this sound; there's an overwhelming compulsion driving the rhythmic sense that is really pushing the poem forward. After we're done, we'll then read "Lady Lazarus" about a 30-year-old woman's struggle to be reborn after many suicide attempts.

Socio-Political Poems

To show students the history of the Socio-Political poem, I will have them read William Blake's "London." Blake basically writes that without the power to dream and the possibility to discover independence, we're doomed

to be administered or “charter’d.” If we can’t free ourselves from administrations, our minds will be handcuffed – “mind-forg’d manacles.” Many kids feel this way about education and sometimes the media too. Blake calls attention to the hypocrisy of religion, as a band-aid for poverty. Students feel very strong about this subject. This poem is powerful in its political message and its use of figurative language to convey this message.

Gwendolyn Brooks writes of black pride and the problems facing Blacks in this country. She uses free verse, which I’ll address with the students, but since she’s so political, I’ve placed her here. We will look at “We Real Cool” and “Kitchenette Building”. Students have studied syntax before, so we’ll look at “We Real Cool” for the effect the syntax produces. By ending each line with a punctuation mark followed by “We” and then an enjambment, Brooks takes the emphasis off the subject and puts it on the verb clause. In her “Kitchenette Building” Brooks discusses how we are so immersed in the deadening routine of everyday life that we cannot realize our dreams. Brooks begins with an allusion to T.S. Eliot with “We are things of dry hours” beginning a not so friendly dialogue. In “Preludes,” Eliot wants to claim the tawdriness of urban life as a burden for menial white-collar workers. Brooks wants to claim it for those who live according to necessity rather than dreaming. Students respond well to this poem; they get very emotionally involved either agreeing with the speaker or refuting the speaker. We can compare this life to that of the movie *The Matrix*. The “involuntary plan” of society and of politicians is that of the Matrix where machines manipulate people, programming us into a mass. This poem is a protest against this programming by society, by politics. Brooks does not specifically place blame, though, for the offender is left ambiguous. My AP students often relate this poem to the feeling of being programmed by society and their parents to go to college, sometimes even which specific college to go to. These poems often give voice to their own feelings, motivating them to analyze them fully.

Adrienne Rich is a well-known feminist writer. “She has become one of the most eloquent, provocative voices on the politics of sexuality, race, language, power, and women’s culture” (Pope). The students will be familiar with her since we will have already compared her “Diving into the Wreck” with Bishop’s “At the Fishhouses.” “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers” is about Aunt Jennifer watching the masculine tigers, a woman’s conflict with society. Next, we will analyze “Living in Sin.”

Philip Larkin is a British poet who is political. We’ll analyze “MCMXIV” and “The Explosion” and “Home is Sad.” Students will compare his “Home is Sad” to Adrienne Rich’s “Living in Sin.” In “The Explosion” Larkin continues a trend in many of his poems for “the event that occasioned the poem provokes the poet to move from an almost casual reflection on the details of the event to a final a deeper empathy with our common human destiny; suffering and death (the mining catastrophe) but also love and beauty (the vision of the wives)” (www.leavingcertsolutions.com). Larkin is known for his scepticism and nostalgia for days past.

Free Verse

Simply put, free verse is poetry that does not have regular, patterned rhythm and meter. I’ll tell the students that the accents follow no pattern and the syllables can’t be measured regularly. Because of this, syntax and word choice create the rhythm and are important to notice. To learn the history of free verse, we will look at some of Walt Whitman’s poetry from *Leaves of Grass*. One of his most famous pieces, “Song of Myself” is an excellent example of what makes Whitman so great. We’ll read numbers 1 and 6. Not only will we look at his style, we’ll look at his message. Walt Whitman was ahead of his time in his inclusion of appreciation for all people. This celebration of people is something I like to reinforce in class whenever I can.

William Carlos Williams’ imagist poetry is written in free verse. “The Red Wheelbarrow” may be his most famous piece, and we will begin with this. There’s a great explanation of the images in Brooks and Warren’s *Understanding Poetry* beginning on page 73. Students will read from this section. There is a single image on

which to focus. “The very arbitrariness of the slashing across the prose sentence may be important: the sentence is denied its own structure, and the reader is, as it were, left staring at the image” (Brooks and Warren 73). I’ll lead students to notice the interpretation is in the first line. William’s “Poem” is also clearly explained in *Understanding Poetry* on pages 570 – 571. After students analyze “Poem,” they will read this analysis and see how they fared.

We will officially end the study of free verse with W.H. Auden’s “The Unknown Citizen,” which has also been on the AP exam. Auden is commenting on the impersonality of society to its citizens and heroes. Brooks and Warren analyze this poem on pages 290 and 291. This is a great poem to focus on for creating theme.

Sonnets

A Sonnet is a fourteen-line poem. The sonnet follows two basic patterns. The English or Shakespearean sonnet consists of three quatrains and a couplet with the rhyme scheme ababcdcdefefgg. Traditional English sonnets are written in iambic pentameter, which has five feet of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. An Italian or Petrarchan sonnet has an octave, or eight-line stanza, followed by a sestet or a six-line stanza. The first octave asks a question and the sestet provides the answer. I will tell students, after I’ve given them the definition of the sonnet, that there are many variables in the way poets write them. For instance, rhymes can vary, and some sonnets don’t resolve a theme.

For students to fully understand the sonnet, we will start with a Shakespearean sonnet, number 73. I will begin by asking the students what this poem is about, which is simultaneously an evocation of old age and underlying touches of self-advertisement. In the first quatrain, a conceit, the leaves are a metaphor for hair, losing it. Shakespeare then moves on to discuss the “boughs which shake” like the tremor or palsy of older hands. His voice has also aged. The students should notice a shift in the second quatrain when the speaker refers to his younger self, adding poignancy to his wanting to be young again. The “night doth take away” creates a tone of aggressiveness, because night is the absence of day, it does not take it away. Shakespeare implies that death steals life, but with “all in rest” Shakespeare creates an immediate anticlimactic moment of just sleeping; he moves back into acceptance of his age. The last quatrain is also a conceit; the spark will be consumed by all previous expenditures of energy, “ashes,” which is a metaphor for the speaker’s enormous amount of energy and liveliness in his youth that has been used up so his current state is the result. The three quatrains force us to think in terms of shorter and shorter time units: a year, a day, the duration of a fire. Life is short. The last couplet says that the very fact of his age makes him more lovable because he knows the love won’t last. The poignancy lay in the fact that he was someone worth knowing. Hopefully students will realize on their own that this is a slightly immodest self-portraiture. There’s a glimpse of bitterness and resentment along with a desire to be desired. This poem is taken generally as one of the homosexual poems Shakespeare wrote to a younger boy he was infatuated with.

We will also read Ben Jonson’s “On My First Son” which illustrates how form helps construct meaning. Jonson writes this sonnet for his son who passed away on his seventh birthday. He begins calling his son “child of my right hand,” which is an allusion to the Geneva Bible where Benjamin is the son of the right hand, providing a way of naming the son indirectly. Since the father’s name is also Ben, there’s a cross-identification between both father and son. This phrase also alludes to the Creed, where the son sits on the right hand of the Father Almighty. The father reproaches himself, but later accepts his loss with the acknowledgement that God has lent the son to him. Students will look at when Jonson writes “just day” he means the son dies on his birthday, the day he paid his debt to God, and the judgment day for the son. Further, it could indicate that the son died justly, while still innocent. He reinforces this idea when he writes that the son “’scaped world’s and flesh’s

rage," (line 7). Since the son died so young, maybe he skips judgment and is immediately redeemed. The three enemies of man are the devil, the world, and flesh, but since the son is innocent, Jonson does not need to name the devil. The last four lines read as an epitaph, which I might need to define for the students. While his son is the elder Jonson's best piece of poetry, he's not being arrogant, but admitting rather the superior importance of life to art. Hopefully students will notice on their own that having only 12 lines stunts the sonnet, as his son's life was also stunted by his untimely death.

We will return to Gwendolyn Brooks and look at her series of soldier sonnets including "Gay Chaps at Bar" and "Dear Defiance." These sonnets focus on the Black man as a soldier fighting against oppression not only from their enemy, but also from their own country. They voice soldier disgust. "Gay Chaps at Bar" is written in off rhyme to reinforce the situation. Brooks took the phrase from a letter she received from a soldier.

William Meredith's "The Illiterate" is a Petrarchan sonnet. This sonnet is a part of a long sequence called Modern Love. I'll ask students what's going on in the octave and in the sestet. Students will then discuss the poet's use of simile and the importance of the letter.

Villanelles

A villanelle is a fixed-form that rhymes and repeats lines in a predetermined pattern. It is typically 19 lines and is comprised of six stanzas: five tercets, three-lined stanzas, and a final quatrain. The first and third lines of the first stanza alternate as the last line of the next four stanzas and then form the final couplet in the quatrain.

Dylan Thomas' "Do Not Go Gently Into That Goodnight" is a famous example of a villanelle. Students may already have heard of this poem. After we read and analyze it, we will discuss why this poem has remained so heavily in our society's consciousness.

"One Art" by Elizabeth Bishop was used for the AP poetry essay question in 1980 (see lesson plan III). After explicating the poem, we will look at an anchor set of students' essays. Using different color highlighters, we will break the essays into parts. A different color will be used for thesis, analysis, summary, and support/examples. Students will be able to visually see the difference between essays that scored a 9 and one that scored a 4. Students realize they need to support their analysis and keep summary to a minimum. Everything we've learned to date can be brought together in this exercise.

Dramatic Monologues

"The Dramatic Monologue is a single speech by a fictional character or an historical figure relating a situation or important moment to a silent audience. The speaker usually reveals aspects of his personality of which he is unaware" (Rozakis 189). The tone of the dramatic monologue is conversational, and we get a real understanding of character. The character speaks, but is controlled by the constraints of the poem.

To understand the history of the dramatic monologue, we will first look at Tennyson's "Ulysses." The first question I'll ask students is whether or not they like Ulysses, the speaker. We will create a T-chart of his virtues and fallibilities. Students are then likely to notice the length of the poem, which goes against the notion of poetry as a means of economy. We will focus on character and how the poem subtly communicates character. Incidentally, this poem was a kind of theme song for the Kennedy Clan, and students would have already studied modern history, so we will explore why. Students should notice there's a comparison of the epic past of two things: 1 - the pathos of today is what makes the epic pretentiousness seem silly. 2 -

largeness of epic is what makes the smallness of today seem silly. The comparison cuts both ways. The speaker starts off by saying we don't know how great he is. He continues by trying to give his son his due, but is incapable of concealing his condescension toward common life. The Ulysses Tennyson writes about is not only the one from Homer, but the one from Dante's *Inferno* XXVI where Ulysses tried to explore the unknown region of the world, and in Homer it is predicted he'd be carrying an oar on his shoulder. When he was asked what the oar was, he'd know he went far enough. Dante's punishment for Ulysses was that he was swallowed up, and he ends up in hell. The reason the students need to know this is because in Homer's work, Ulysses or Odysseus is known as a man of great rhetoric. In Dante's work, Ulysses repeats a long speech that he said to his men. Tennyson is picking up on this reputation by making the monologue grandly elegant and verbose.

Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess" is a dramatic monologue written in rhyming pentameter couplets. We hear the Duke speaking about his dead wife, and we quickly learn the overbearing nature of the Duke. In the first two lines, the speaker is addressing the unidentified audience. "Last" implies that the Duke may have had more wives and also indicates that she is a possession, like the painting itself. We also know that she is dead. The students probably won't know this fact – when the curtain covers a painting, it means the person in the portrait has done something terrible. So the question to the students is, what kind of man is the Duke? What was the Duchess actually like? What can we infer? And of course how did Browning create these answers with his words?

A modern-day version of the dramatic monologue can be found in John Hollander's "Mad Potter." Hollander writes of the unrealized potential of the potter and of his pottery. Students will like this poem.

Writing Assignments

Writing assignments will be both informal and formal and will include in-class essays and larger, extended out of class, typed essays. The in-class essays are similar to the AP exam poetry essay and the at home essay is similar to the kind of assignment students will encounter in college.

For the in-class essays, students can take the entire block period to write them until January. Once they are accustomed to thinking and planning on their feet, they will have 35 minutes to write their essays. Since they get 40 minutes per essay on the exam, this prepares them for the time constraints. I use a few AP preparation books to help my students prepare for the essays including Amsco's AP prep book, *5 Steps to a 5*, and the Arco AP exam prep book. Students can look at examples, and the workbooks break down the writing process into parts so the students can master each step as they go. Further, we look at released exams.

Sample AP Questions

On the AP exam, there are multiple-choice questions and an essay question on poetry. The multiple-choice questions range from identifying the antecedent to a pronoun in one of the lines to identifying the prominent poetic device in the poem. A great way to have students understand the multiple-choice is to give them some examples of the kinds of questions that are asked and the different types of answers, which can be found in

any test prep book, and have the students write their own questions. While not all the questions themselves may be good, the product is not really the important thing, the process is.

AP essay questions use either one or two poems and range in question, but the type of question is usually the same. I looked at the past questions and have found some recurring elements. Many prompts including asking for how the poem's diction or language describes the speaker's attitude towards something or someone in the poem. Students are also asked to show how the attitudes in two poems differ. One asks for students to pay attention to the physical intensity of the language and show how the poet conveys the whole meaning of the experience in the poem than just the literal. A few others ask how the language reflects the changing perception and emotions of the speaker. Lastly, many ask a question and then suggest students can include elements such as diction, imagery, metaphor, rhyme, rhythm, form, and syntax to answer the question. Of course students should only choose two or three elements so they can develop their argument comprehensively. At an AP workshop I went to, the instructor suggested that if the students use the prompt in the thesis statement, they add strong adjectives in front of the poetic element, i.e. vivid imagery, medical or bodily or antiquated diction.

Lesson Plans

The amount of time per class varies depending on the day. My classes last anywhere from 50 minutes to 100 minutes.

Lesson Plan One: Most Important Word and Phrase

Since students tend to have a hard time with analysis, this lesson allows students to think critically about the importance a word or phrase can have in creating meaning. Students then must support their decision with both a written and oral explanation. Students, even AP students, often have trouble justifying their opinions and analysis using text. After we do this, we will do a pointed reading of the poem followed by a class discussion.

A. I will read aloud W.D. Snodgrass's "Heart's Needle." Students will follow along as I read.

B. Students will then read the poem to themselves. After they have read the poem, they will write in their notebooks what they think is the most important word and the most important phrase in the poem and why. They will take about 10 minutes to complete this.

C. Students will then get into groups of two or three and read their answers and explanations to each other. It is important the students read their answers instead of summarize. Students will have 10 to 20 minutes to do this, depending on how much time they need to continually be productive. Students will have already had this type of peer-conference, so they already know their job is to either affirm or rearrange or learn something new about each other's thinking.

D. Students will move back into their seat and we'll do what is called a Pointed Reading. I'll read the poem again aloud, and this time students will join me in reading aloud when we get to their most important word and phrase. Students will be able to hear everyone's choices and will be able to see what words or phrases were popularly chosen.

E. We will then make a chart on the board of everyone's answers and a brief recording of why they chose their words or phrases. We will then discuss the poem.

What usually happens is by the time we've finished going over everyone's different answers, we've done a thorough analysis of the poem. If this doesn't happen, I'll lead us into a more complete analysis of the poem.

Lesson Plan II: Explicating a Poem

Students need to explicate the poem using the New Critical school of thought. Students will have some experience explicating poems. We will explicate Shakespeare's sonnet number 73. I will have already put an explanation of the different types of sonnets on the board for students to copy down into their notebooks. Students will get a better understanding of the history of the sonnet studying Shakespeare, even though he is obviously not post-war.

A. Students will read the sonnet to themselves. I will then read the sonnet aloud to them, and then they will read it again by themselves.

B. Students will try to explicate the poem in groups of two or three. They will follow these questions. They can either discuss the questions or write down answers. After they've answered and discussed the questions, they will have completed their explication.

- What is this poem about? Who is speaking? Who is being addressed?
- What is the tone of the poem?
- What is being said in the first quatrain? How?
- Why is the time of year significant?
- What are the leaves a metaphor for? How do you know?
- What do the boughs and the choirs represent? How does this reinforce the theme?
- Why does the poet start with this?
- What is being said in the second quatrain? How?
- How does the addressee see the speaker?
- What function does night serve? What tone does this create?
- What affect does the alliteration have here?
- What is being said in the third quatrain? How?
- What can you notice about the first phrase? How does it compare to the second quatrain's beginning? What is the point of this?
- What are the ashes a metaphor for? What is to be inferred from this?
- What is the speaker trying to say to his audience?
- What is being said in the couplet? How?

- Why does this make the poem more poignant?
- What is the desired outcome from this poem?

C. After students answer their questions in their groups, each group will present their answers and explication of the poem to the rest of the class. We will discuss the differences and similarities of the answers.

D. Students will have to explicate Ben Jonson's "On My First Son" for homework.

Lesson Plan III: Group Essay

When I ask students to write an essay on a new genre, I model one first, and then I assign the essay in groups. Student groups are to create a strong thesis statement and then an outline of their essay finding examples from the text. This helps them practice the process, which is just as important as the product. Since eventually students will only have 35 minutes to write an essay, a daunting idea to many of them, these types of exercises prepare them for that.

A. Students will break into groups of three. Together they will read Elizabeth Bishop's "One Art."

B. Students will create a thesis statement and an outline of their essay, including examples from the text, answering the following question: Prompt: Write an essay in which you describe how the speaker's attitude toward loss in lines 16-19 is related to her attitude toward loss in lines 1-15. Using specific references to the

text, show how verse form and language contribute to the reader's understanding of these attitudes. (1980 exam question)

C. Students will then read their theses and outlines to the class. I'll copy on the overhead the thesis statements.

D. As a class, we will strengthen the thesis statements together.

Lesson Plan IV: They Say I Say Chart

Students need to be able to be able to support or refute an argument or literary commentary by someone else. Often students feel that if someone wrote it, it must be correct. They don't think to see if they agree with the argument if a credible person wrote it. The They Say I Say Chart helps combat this tendency to take second-hand information as rote. Students will have already read Elizabeth Bishop's "At the Fishhouses" and Adrienne Rich's "Diving into the Wreck." They will have also compared these two poems already.

A. The class will read together Roger Gilbert's "Comparing Elizabeth Bishop's 'At the Fishhouses' and Adrienne Rich's 'Diving into the Wreck.'"

B. Students will underline or highlight Gilbert's main points in his argument.

C. Students will then underline or highlight their main points in their own comparison.

D. Students will then create a They Say I Say T Chart comparing what Gilbert says with what they say.

They Say| Say

E. The class will then share their charts with each other, discussing their arguments vs. Gilbert's.

(chart available in print form)

Helpful Websites for Teachers

Besides these websites, you can always use a search engine to find information on the poets. My two favorites are www.37.com and www.google.com.

- www.English.uiuc.edu/maps/poets.htm – “Modern American Poetry.” A great website with links to authors, listed alphabetically. There is biographical information as well as literary criticisms for the poets.
- www.artandculture.com/arts/movement?movementId=548 – provides an introduction to confessional poetry and has links.
- <http://pubweb.acns.nwu.edu/~jem973/eng372.htm> – Northwestern University instructor John Martin provides a course outline with a great deal of links for confessional poetry.
- www.poets.org – “The Academy of American Poets” – a great site that has poets and some of their poems and links for each poet.

Teacher Bibliography

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Bevilacqua, Mary, Elfie Israel, and Rosemary Timoney. *Amsco's AP Literature and Composition: Preparing for the Advanced Placement Exam* . New York: Amsco School Publications, Inc., 2002. This is a great resource for AP English Literature and Composition test preparation materials.

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Ferguson, Margaret, Mary Jo Salter and Jon Stallworthy, eds. *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* . Fourth edition. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996. There is a brief introduction to poetry and then an anthology of poems in chronological order. A great wealth of poems.

Gilbert, Roger. “Comparing Elizabeth Bishop’s ‘At the Fishhouses’ and Adrienne Rich’s ‘Diving into the Wreck.’” Summer 1997. An easy to understand comparison of the two poems.

Parkinson, T. *Robert Lowell: A Collection of Critical Essays* . 1968. Provides some commentary on the writers’ works, by Lowell himself.

Pope, Deborah. “Rich’s Life and Career.” *Modern American Poets* . www.English.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/m-r/rich/bio.htm. – a succinct reference for Rich’s life and career.

Preminger, Alex and T.U.F. Brogan. *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* . Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993. A comprehensive explanation of poetry terms, schools of thought, and poetics.

Rankin, Estelle and Barbara Murphy. *5 Steps to a 5: AP English Literature* . New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002. A Great resource on how to help your students get a 5 on the AP exam. Covers everything for the exam.

Rozakis, Laurie, Ph.D. *ARCO: AP English Literature and Composition* . New York: MacMillan Reference USA, 1997. Another good study guide for the exam.

Student Reading List

Texts

Arp, Thomas R. and Greg Johnson. *Perrine's Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense* . Eighth edition. Boston: Heinle and Heinle, 2002. This is a college-level anthology of short stories, novels, poems, and dramas. It is the textbook for my AP class.

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Poems

Confessional

Berryman, John. "Dreamsong:

Bishop, Elizabeth. "Sandpiper"

--- "Sestina"

--- "The Armadillo"

Lowell, Robert. "3 Months Away"

---" For the Union Dead"

--- "Skunk Hour"

Plath, Sylvia. "Daddy"

---"Lady Lazarus"

Sexton, Anne. "Double Image"

--- "Her Kind"

---"The Abortion"

Snodgrass, W.D. "Heart's Needle"

---"Mementos, 1"

Socio-political

Blake, William. "London"

Brooks, Gwendolyn. "Kitchenette Building"

---"We Real Cool"

Larkin, Philip. "Home is Sad"

--- "MCMXIV"

---"The Explosion"

Rich, Adrienne. "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers"

--- "Diving into the Wreck"

--- "Living in Sin"

Free Verse

Auden, W.H. "Unknown Citizen"

Whitman, Walt. "Song of Myself"

Williams, William Carlos. "Poem"

--- "The Red Wheelbarrow"

Sonnets

Jonson, Ben. "On My First Son"

Meredith, William. "The Illiterate"

Shakespeare, William. Sonnet #73

Villanelles

Bishop, Elizabeth. "One Art"

Thomas, Dylan. "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Goodnight"

Dramatic Monologues

Browning, Robert. "My Last Duchess"

Hollander, John. "Mad Potter"

Tennyson, Lord Alfred. "Ulysses"

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