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2011 Volume III: The Sound of Words: An Introduction to Poetry

Silence, Songs, and Sounds: Developing Second Language Literacy through Poetry

Curriculum Unit 11.03.02
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here Spanish
goes to school
with English [...]
and following
the beat of teacher
Felipe's *clave*
here children
learn to sing
with their hearts ¹

Introduction

This curriculum unit stems from two problems we encounter in the first grade. The first is that too many students enter with low oral language skills, whether lacking the English proficiency or the natural experience found at home or in preschool of playing with words and language conventions. This is especially true for the students in my bilingual classroom, who come from Spanish-speaking homes with little opportunity for English language experience. The second is that while students have been exposed to poetry, they do not fully understand what it is. Most children would be content to tell you that poetry is anything that rhymes; however, as adults we know this is far from the case, and our job is to open the door for students to the magical world created by the sounds and images of well-written poetry, as illustrated in the lines of the Francisco Alarcón poem. This unit will address these two problems in concert, using a variety of quality children's poetry to expand young students' understanding of what poetry is while simultaneously working to help them build up their oral language skills as a precursor to and in support of their early literacy development. In the case of my class, this will mean building English language skills through students' already semi-developed Spanish language skills. By exploring the "sounds" of poems, including rhyme, rhythm, and tone, as well as alliteration, onomatopoeia, and repetition, students will have the opportunity to experience language. They will see how poets carefully select words to create vivid images for their readers and how the way we read these poems affects our reactions to them. Students will interact with poets who speak to them, and who in turn can give them the language they need to communicate their ideas about the world around them. Most importantly, they will "learn to sing with their hearts" through the sounds of poetry.

Poetry is an extremely valuable tool in early literacy teaching. Many students find poetry more accessible than the narrative or informational texts they are expected to read, and are comforted by the short format and relatively low word count. Or as Sara Holbrook puts it in her book *Practical Poetry: A Nonstandard Approach to Meeting Content-Area Standards*, "See, poetry is like candy. Kids gobble it down. They gaggle together, giggle over it, and grind their teeth trying to create their own. Kids love poetry." ² The Mondo literacy curriculum used at my school incorporates a number of poems and songs into its instructional materials, following current research showing that young children benefit greatly in their language and literacy development through the use of these repetitive tools. ³ Many students are excited by poetry's descriptive language or the patterns of rhyme or rhythm. As noted by Dixie Lee Spiegel, "poetry is often used only as a time filler or for a change of pace and not as a unique genre with its own purpose and value." ⁴ However, as I have found in my own teaching, its format makes it an incredibly useful tool in terms of teaching important literacy skills from word attack and decoding to reading comprehension. Because poems are short, they can be read and repeated in a single instructional session, and accessed by lower readers. Quality poetry contains all of the elements of literature necessary to help build reading comprehension skills, and students can practice identifying the main idea, making connections, determining author's purpose, and finding evidence in the text to prove a theory, just to name a few of the skills developed in the lower elementary grades. Furthermore, poems are a wonderful way to help students build their reading fluency, as they can read and reread a poem numerous times until they feel completely confident in their recitation of it.

For young children who have not been exposed to rich language in their early development, poetry becomes a way to engage them in their learning and begin to build their vocabulary. Studies have shown that children in impoverished homes do not have the opportunities to develop the same language structure and vocabulary of children growing up in more affluent homes. ⁵ This gap is created quite early in a child's life, and as teachers we must try to do our best to fill it in as much as possible in the time we spend with our students in the

classroom. I agree with many researchers that using poetry in the classroom is one of the most effective ways to begin to do this.

Rationale

This unit is intended to be used with bilingual or ELL students in the lower elementary grades. My first grade bilingual class at John S. Martinez is composed of students from first-generation immigrant families from Spanish-speaking countries. At this time in their development, they may have varying levels of oral proficiency in Spanish, but are struggling to communicate in English, their second language. Many sit silently through class, trying to make meaning whenever possible. Many make attempts at communication, stringing together nouns and verbs perhaps conjugated incorrectly. The majority of students are able at most to communicate through simple sentences without much elaboration. It is my job to provide a rich language experience where students can build vocabulary and model proper grammar, while also engaging my students in a judgment-free environment where everyone's voice is heard and valued.

Part of my job is to respect that many of my students, being new to English, just need to listen for a while. The title of my curriculum unit refers to stages in second language acquisition, which range from a silent stage to a fully advanced fluent stage. The first stage is called "pre-production" or "the silent stage," in which students may have up to 500 words in their receptive vocabulary but tend to "parrot" what others say rather than producing their own speech. The second is called "early production," during which students begin to speak in short phrases. This stage is followed by "speech emergence," "intermediate fluency," and "advanced fluency," which can take up to 10 years to develop. During the earlier of these phases, students greatly benefit from the repetition and rhythm of songs and poems to help them learn the structures of English language. Once students have progressed to the more advanced of these stages, they are ready to make sense of the systematic sounds and structure of the language which can allow them to learn to read and write in conventional English. ⁶

In Connecticut, students identified bilingual upon entering school in kindergarten are administered the LAS Links test for English proficiency each year. According to the Connecticut RESC Alliance documents I received at a training on differentiating for English Language Learners, students scoring at the lowest levels on the LAS Links test understand very little English, may not talk at all, and are beginning to speak in one or two word phrases. As they become more familiar with the language, they can begin to understand most conversational English vocabulary, but not necessarily academic vocabulary, and speak in simple sentences with some incorrect grammar usage. The Alliance suggests that students in the lower stages be taught explicit phonemic awareness, phonic rules and skills, provided shortened text and provided materials with patterned sentence structure. Songs and poems, being rhythmic and repetitive, provide students with some of the very first language structures to hold onto and should be used often to give students the opportunity to feel comfortable and confident in their language production. As students become familiar with the materials, the teacher can begin to point out and later focus on the phonics, phonemic patterns, and print skills found in many poems. I would suggest for the purpose of this unit that the teacher not choose to use poems with unconventional grammar or punctuation, as these concepts can be brought in after the students have developed an understanding of these systems.

Teachers of English Language Learners know that the best, and most fun, way to promote language development is through song. Songs are easy to learn and remember, and when words are set to music, students instinctively pick up the rhythm and melody of the song. Since it is easy to teach students a song, songs act as a wonderful tool to use for early language and literacy skills. They help teach students' basic pre-literacy skills such as phonemic awareness through rhyming, phrasing, and 1 to 1 correspondence of spoken words to print. They also provide opportunities for vocabulary development, and their repetitive nature allows for students to master and take ownership of them to further practice all of these skills independently. I use songs frequently throughout the year as mnemonics for students to remember the days of the week, months of the year, addition facts, and other basic information. Even as an adult I rely on some of the mnemonics that I learned in elementary school to recall these facts!

Poems are inherently fun for young students. Many teachers and researchers have found that students reluctant to read or write in narrative forms connect in a different way with poetry. Poetry and song also create a natural transition from young children's instinctive use of song and rhythmic language in their early development to the more structured and rigid language of prose literature. In fact, as noted by Northrop Frye,

"[T]he rhymes and jingles, the familiar verse children *already knew*, would make the best reading material for beginners. Frye (1970) wonders why elementary educators fail to capitalize on the young child's propensity for and delight in riddles, conundrums, tongue twisters, rhymes, and puns. Surely their oral lore, full of chanting and singing, is the perfect first reading material for them." ⁷

Poets work for a living to do what for many children comes naturally: string words together to create a sing-song rhythm, rhyming lines, and repetitive verses. While in many cases what they come up with is nonsense, young students are gathering their first language experiences in a meaningful and important way that creates a transition from spoken to written word. As teachers, we need to use students' background knowledge, or in this case their natural tendencies, to ease them into the written world that will make up the bulk of their schooling experience.

As I researched for this unit, I was amazed at the availability of well-written, quality children's poetry. I have often been discouraged by many of the poems used in published curricula, which in their emphasis on rhyming or sight words accessible to the earliest readers tend to leave out any real meaning. However, my discouragement quickly turned to excitement as I thought about how my students would react to these quirky, educational, and/or emotional poems and how they would integrate them into their schema of literacy and language. Some of the poets that I suggest for use in this unit are: Eloise Greenfield, Joyce Sidman, Jack Prelutsky, and Paul Fleischman. All of these poets write kid-friendly, highly relevant poems that communicate their messages through the use of fun, clever, and often silly sound techniques, which I will discuss in the following sections.

Unit Objectives

Along with addressing the Connecticut state literacy standards, the objectives for this unit include:

- Students will learn that poets use sound devices to make poems sound better and to create vivid images

- Students will be able to identify the sound devices of alliteration, onomatopoeia, rhyme, rhythm, and repetition
- Students will be able to recite/perform poems with attention to rhythm and tone
- Students' oral language and literacy levels will improve as a result of increasing vocabulary, phonemic awareness skills, and fluency practice

Poetry and literary devices

In order to be able to teach students about the sounds of poetry, the teacher must first familiarize him/herself with the literary devices used to convey rich sounds, and through sound, mood, and meaning, in poems. In this section, I will provide a brief explanation of the different sound-based poetic techniques. These techniques have allowed poems to survive since before the written tradition and help infuse poems with the emotion they so successfully convey. As teacher of this unit, take some time to read poetry (whether children's poetry or anything else!) to immerse yourself in the genre you will be teaching to your students, and to form a deeper understanding for yourself of the concepts you will be using with your class.

Alliteration

Alliteration is the repetition of the initial consonant in a number of words on the same line in a poem. For example, in Paul Fleischman's poem "Whirligig Beetles", he uses many words beginning with the letters "w", "b", and "s" as he writes:

We're whirligig beetles,
We're swimming in circles,
Black backs by the hundred,
We're spinning and swerving,
As if we're on a mad merry-go-round. ⁸

Encouraging students to attend to alliteration in poetry will not only teach them how poets use this sound technique to create vibrant language, but will also help them understand letter-sound correspondence in English (a concept they may already be familiar with in Spanish). They will identify the many words that begin with the same letter, and practice making that sound over and over as they discover, repeat, and perform the poems.

Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia is the property of some words that the word itself seems to sound like the idea it refers to. In one of Joyce Sidman's animal poems, "Budgie Babies" about the Australian Budgerigar Parakeet, the poet uses onomatopoeia to help the reader visualize the ruckus in the budgie nest at mealtime:

Budgie babies bellow boldly,
brawl and **babble** , **screech** and **squeal** ,
push and pummel brothers, sisters,
for a tasty budgie meal. ⁹

If you read these words aloud, you can't help but make a babbling sound as you read the word "babble", and a screeching sound as you read the word "screech". Students will be able to create a mental image, complete with sound effects, of what a nest of hungry budgies looks like as the birds *babble*, *screech*, and *squeal*. Furthermore, onomatopoeia will also help to teach students new vocabulary words that they will understand because they are vivid and contextually relevant, and they will hopefully begin to incorporate these words into their speech and writing to boost their English language production.

Rhyme

Rhyme, as we all know, is the repetition of similar ending sounds in words, most often at the end of lines of poetry. Most children's poems are rhyming poems, as in Jack Prelutsky's poem, "Jellyfish Stew":

You're soggy, you're *smelly* ,
you taste like **shampoo** ,
you bog down my *belly* ,
with oodles of **goo** ,
yet I would glue *noodles*
and prunes to my **shoe** ,
for one oozy *spoonful*
of jellyfish **stew** . ¹⁰

In this poem, the last word of every other line rhymes, which is a common format in children's poetry. Rhyming is a very important pre-literacy skill, as it helps students in their word attack and decoding skills when they can make analogies between known words and words in the same word family. It is also important that students learn that in English, the same sound can be made by using a variety of different vowels and blends, while at the same time words that look the same can sound different. Rhyming poems are a great tool to highlight this fact and show students examples (i.e. goo/shoe/stew) of words that rhyme but are spelled with different vowel blends.

Rhythm

Rhythm is often expressed as a repeated pattern of stressed and unstressed words and/or syllables. Rhythm can give a poem a feeling that it is moving fast or slow. In her poem "Rope Rhyme," Eloise Greenfield uses the rhythm of her words to create the quick, methodical rhythm of a jump rope:

Get set, ready now, jump right in
Bounce and kick and giggle and spin
Listen to the rope when it hits the ground
Listen to that clappedy-slappedy sound. ¹¹

Without even analyzing the accents or stresses of particular words and/or syllables, students can already hear the rhythm of the poem. However, teaching students to identify where the stress in the words falls will help them learn how to break words into syllables, another important pre-literacy skill that teaches students how to use their knowledge of syllables to break apart multisyllabic words and decode them piece by piece. Teaching students to systematically find the stressed and unstressed syllables in poems will also help them in their reading fluency so that they learn to listen to themselves as they read and make their reading expressive while staying true to the author's intention and the tone of the text.

Repetition

Repetition is the repeated use of the same word, phrase, or line in a poem, to highlight its importance. In her poem "Things", Eloise Greenfield repeats the line "ain't got it no more" and "still got it" to emphasize the temporariness of physical things in contrast with the timelessness of a poem:

Went to the corner
Walked into the store
Bought me some candy
Ain't got it no more
Ain't got it no more [...]
Went into the kitchen
Lay down on the floor

Made me a poem
Still got it
Still got it. ¹²

By attending to repetition in poetry, students will work on making meaning of the poet's words as well as practice reading the same line again and again, adding it to their repertoire of vocabulary and language structures.

Tone

The tone of a poem is the feeling that its words convey—the emphasis is not on *what* is said but rather on *how* it is said and in what context. In the words of the great poet Robert Frost, "the sentence that takes rank as poetry must do double duty. It will not neglect the meaning it can convey in words; but it will succeed chiefly by some meaning it conveys by tone of voice." ¹³ While tone is a sound-based poetic device, it is deeply connected with the meaning of the poem. We must think about the poet's intention and the narrator's point of view in order to properly convey his/her message in our reading of the poem. In Eloise Greenfield's poem "I Look Pretty", the narrator is putting on her mother's clothing and looking at herself in the mirror, discussing how beautiful she feels:

Mama's shiny purple coat
Giant-sized shoulder bag to tote [...]
I look pretty
I float
I smile
I pose. ¹⁴

To communicate Eloise Greenfield's intention, we must put ourselves in the place of a young girl feeling grown-up and beautiful in her mother's clothes, and read it with a sense of sophistication and confidence.

Conversely, the tone of Jack Prelutsky's narrator in his poem "The Snowman's Lament" is quite different as he describes the tragic fate of the snowman in spring:

My snowman sadly bowed his head
in March, one sunny day,
and this is what he softly said
before he went away. ¹⁵

Encouraging students to think about the tone of a poem will help them connect with the poem's meaning, as well as improve their reading fluency and expressive reading skills, as they are required to think about how to read with the appropriate inflection, intonation, pace, and volume to convey the poem's message.

Strategies for instruction

In my first grade classroom, my literacy block consists of a 10-15 minute shared reading block, followed by 3 15-20 minute center rotations. A daily objective is introduced during the shared reading block, using materials that are accessible to all students (usually a Big Book). During this time, the teacher introduces and models the daily objective, and then invites students to practice using the class book. After this whole-class activity, the students then move through a rotation of literacy activities in which they practice the daily comprehension objective with a variety of materials, including familiar big books, familiar trade books, their own independent reading books (at their independent reading level), a book on tape in a listening center, and with the teacher in small focus groups.

I intend for this format to be used in the instruction of this unit, but these strategies can be adapted and incorporated into any other literacy block format. Poems will be presented over a period of a couple of days, so that students can become very familiar with the poem, but each day will focus on a different instructional objective. For example, the first day might focus on the alliteration, the next day on rhyming words, the next day on rhythm and tone, and so on. Depending on the group of students, multiple objectives could be introduced on the same day, or may be repeated over a couple of lessons. After a poem is introduced during whole-class instruction, students will receive a copy of the poem to keep in a poetry folder, and the poem will be displayed in the pocket chart center, where students can review the poem and engage in a task, whether it be to mix up the lines of the poem and put them back in order, cover up words and figure out what word is missing, and depending on the students, maybe even remove and change parts of the poem. Students will also be immersed in the poetry genre by having access to a wide variety of poetry books in a poetry center,

listen to poems recorded on tape in the listening center, and study poems instead of leveled texts with the teacher in instructional focus groups. This unit will culminate in student presentations of poetry, and so one center will allow students to record and then listen to themselves reciting the poem of their choice so they can perfect the elements of sound that they will be learning. Other options could include setting up a poetry writing center and a "make your own poetry" center with magnetic words and cookie sheets.

I have designed this unit to span approximately one month, to take place in the beginning half of the school year when students are still developing basic pre-literacy skills like letter-sound correspondence, one-to-one matching while reading, and the concept of rhyme. However, it can be adapted to any time throughout the year based on how the district curriculum can be adapted to make room. (Ideally you will return to using poetry at various points throughout the year!) In this time period, the teacher will present 8-10 poems to the class, another 3-4 to small focus groups, and provide access to many more poems throughout the literacy block. The culmination of the unit will be a presentation, during which each student will choose a poem to present to the class. Students will explain why they chose their poem, and then demonstrate their understanding of sound techniques used in poetry by performing their poem with proper expression and rhythm. Students may choose from the poems originally presented by the teacher, or may select a poem found on their own. While this unit will not address writing poetry, it would be a great idea to instruct the class in the writing of poetry either at the same time or shortly after this unit is introduced, as students will be connecting with poetry and may feel the desire to express themselves through the same techniques they are practicing identifying and reading.

Before beginning this unit, the teacher should already have exposed students to songs and poems from the first day of school. While I will not go into detail about songs to be used in this unit, they can often be interchanged with poems, especially for the lessons on rhythm and rhyme. Songs are a wonderful way to introduce students to poetry, as they essentially are poems set to music. Studying songs with students will help students develop the skills they will need to attend to the various elements of poetry that will be expanded upon throughout the unit. For example: the beginning of first grade is the perfect time to teach students songs about the days of the week, colors, numbers, etc. At this time, as the song is being taught and repeated daily, the teacher should put the words up where they are easily accessible to students so that students begin to connect the words being sung with the written word. Songs are even easier than poems for students to remember and therefore will become some of their first independent reading materials.

When choosing poetry for this unit, a number of factors must be considered. I find the two most important factors to be potential student interest—the poems must be accessible and relatable for students—and that the poems contain the literary elements intended to be taught. Because as reading teachers we are always prioritizing making meaning, the poems must also have a worthwhile theme and/or purpose. That being said, there are endless amounts of resources available to teachers of poetry, and the most important thing is to choose poems you feel the students will connect to and be able to make meaning from. This was aptly noted by Flora J. Arnstein, who wrote about her success using poetry in the elementary classroom:

"Now, the poems must be immediately intelligible. It must be related to the children's familiar experience. It must be simple and genuinely felt. And, not least in importance, it must be one that appeals to the teacher in its own right, one that she, too, may genuinely enjoy." ¹⁶

As adult readers of poetry, we find poems we enjoy and identify with, and the same will be true of students. Of course, there is no way to choose poetry that appeals to every student, but hopefully you will use a wide enough range of poems that are accessible to young learners and each student will come away with a number

of poems that speak to him or her.

Each whole-class lesson should take on the following format. I would have the whole class on the carpet in front of an easel on which the poem is displayed, but alternatively students could be at their desks and the poem on the overhead projector and/or each student provided with his/her own copy of the poem:

1. Teacher presents a poem to the class, noting the title and the author.
2. Teacher reads aloud the poem to the class, pointing to the words with a pointer as s/he reads the words. Then the class reads the poem together multiple times.
3. Teacher explains daily objective to students.
4. Teacher models how to identify the day's objective (alliteration, onomatopoeia, repetition, etc.) and provides a few examples.
5. Teacher gives students the opportunity to identify a number of examples if possible. Students turn to a partner or group to discuss and find examples.
6. Students come back and share what they have found with the class.
7. During the literacy centers that follow, students will practice the daily objective with a variety of poems available on photocopies, poetry books, poetry on audiotape, and/or poetry written out onto sentence strips in a pocket chart.
8. At the end of the literacy centers, students come back and share what they have found. You may choose to provide them with a graphic organizer such as the one in Appendix A, blank paper, sticky notes, or any other materials to help them organize their findings.

I intend for this unit to be taught in a series of approximately 10 lessons, with the following sequence, although it is up to you as the teacher to decide if you need to spend more or less time on any given concept. Needless to say, while the focus for a particular lesson may be one sound device, the other devices previously taught should be returned to for practice. I intend for the lessons to be supplemented with other activities to take place during literacy centers, phonics/skills block, interactive read-aloud, writing, and any other time of day deemed fit for poetry practice. Each of the poems used in these lessons should be provided to students to be placed in a poetry folder, so that students can refer back to these poems, practice reciting them, and have them available when choosing a poem for their final presentation. Students will also store their graphic organizers and other poetry materials in these folders.

Lesson one: Alliteration

Lesson two: Onomatopoeia

Lesson three: Rhyme (with emphasis on similar spelling patterns)

Lesson four: Rhyme (with emphasis on different spelling patterns)

Lesson five: Rhythm

Lesson six: Rhythm, continued

Lesson seven: Repetition

Lesson eight: Tone

Lesson nine: Tone, continued

Lesson ten: Choosing a poem and preparing for final presentation

Assessment: Final presentation and analysis of poem

As mentioned earlier, I intend the final culmination of this unit to be a presentation during which each student chooses a poem to recite to the class (either by memory or with the help of the poem in front of them, depending on abilities/needs). Students must be guided throughout the process of preparing their poems for performance over a period of about a week or two. The first step will be students' choosing a poem. Again, explain and emphasize for students that it should be a poem that they enjoy and will continue to find pleasure in reading again and again. Next, have a conversation with each student about what s/he likes about the poem. Have each student fill out the graphic organizer in Appendix B using their poem. This can also serve as an assessment tool to evaluate student learning during the unit.

Sample lesson plans

These are three samples of lessons that may be included in this unit. Feel free to modify as necessary for your students. However, this is the suggested order of the lessons, beginning with the most concrete concepts and moving towards the more difficult ones.

Lesson Two:

Topic: Onomatopoeia/sound words

Objectives:

- a. Students will learn to identify "sound words" in poems.
- b. Students will learn to read the sound words with appropriate expression and intonation.
- c. Students will be able to explain why the poet uses these sound words in the poem.

Materials:

- a. "Budgie Babies" by Joyce Sidman, or another poem with multiple onomatopoeic words, on a poster or on the overhead projector so all students can see (and a copy of the poem for students to put in their poetry folders)
- b. Other poetry books and/or photocopies of poems easily accessible to students (to be used during the literacy centers block).

Procedure:

- a. The teacher presents the poem to the students, reading it a couple of times with appropriate expression and pointing to the words as s/he reads them. The students may also be given the opportunity to read along, either before or after the objective is introduced.
- b. The teacher introduces the idea of "sound words", words that sound like what they refer to. The teacher points out a couple of examples, and then asks students to turn to their partners and talk about other examples they find in the poem. *Try to pair less proficient students with more proficient ones , so that all students have the chance to access the material.*
- c. Spend some time saying the sound words over and over, exaggerating the sound they make.
- d. Then, lead the students in a discussion about why the author might have chosen these particular words, emphasizing the fact that poetry appeals to all the senses, including hearing, which helps create vivid images of what they are trying to describe.
- e. Students are dismissed to their literacy centers, during which time they find other examples of poems heavy with sound words, and either use a graphic organizer or sticky notes to document their findings. They may also spend time practicing reading this and other poems to themselves, to a partner, into a tape recorder, and/or with the teacher during small group work. At the end of the centers time, students will come back together to share their findings.

Lesson four:

Topic: Rhythm/accnt

Objectives:

- a. Students will learn to identify the rhythm of a poem by finding the stressed syllables
- b. Students will practice reciting a poem with rhythm, emphasized by their voice and/or clapping or other rhythmic sounds

Materials:

- a. "Rope Rhyme" by Eloise Greenfield, or another poem with a strong rhythm, on poster or overhead projector. Songs can also be interchanged with poems for this lesson, since the tune and rhythm are more apparent and may be easier for students to identify.
- b. Tools to make rhythm (pencils to tap, bins to bang on, etc.)

Procedure:

- a. Read the poem to students, placing emphasis on stressed syllables to create a strong rhythm. Then read again with no rhythm. Open up a discussion to identify the difference between the two readings. Through this discussion, introduce the students to the idea of rhythm and what it does for a poem. Have them clap along and/or use tools to tap along with the rhythm. In the poem "Rope Rhyme", they can talk about how the rhythm echoes the repetitive sound of the jump rope slapping the ground.
- b. Have students help identify the stressed syllables, and mark them on the poster.

- c. Read the poem together as a class, pointing to words and exaggerating stressed syllables.
- d. Encourage students to find poems with rhythm during the centers block and share them with the class afterward.

Lesson eight:

Topic: Tone

Objectives:

- a. Students will learn that poems have a tone in which they should be read. The poet creates a tone through word choice and subject matter. While this is a complex idea that students might not fully grasp, they should be able to understand that poems should be read in a certain way to fully make sense.
- b. Students will be able to identify the tone of a poem (along with vocabulary to explain the tone).
- c. Students will be able to recite a poem with appropriate tone.

Materials:

- a. "I Look Pretty" by Eloise Greenfield and "The Snowman's Lament" by Jack Prelutsky, or another set of two poems with very different tones (on posters or on the overhead projector)
- b. A list of words used to describe tone in poems. A few examples include: silly, playful, serious, contemplative, fun, light, mysterious, nostalgic.

Procedure:

- a. Read the first poem to the class. Together, identify the main idea of the poem, or what it is mostly about. Repeat with the second poem.
- b. Explain to students that when poets write a poem, they have a tone in mind based on what the poem is about. They express this tone to the reader through word choice, sentence/line structure, and other techniques. Teacher can refer back to some of the other poems that have been used in class and begin identifying what kind of poems these are. Refer to the list of types of tone, defining them and providing examples whenever possible.
- c. Spend some time discussing the tone of the two poems read in this lesson. Practice reading the poems in the appropriate tone and inappropriate ones, and let the students discuss what sounds right or wrong and why. Then give them the chance to practice reading with the appropriate tone, together and then individually (some of the more confident students may be ready to read in front of the class).
- d. In their centers, have students choose a poem (not the ones used in the lesson) and think about the tone. They can fill out the graphic organizer and discuss with their peers, and then come back to share at the end of the centers period.

Preparing for final presentation

Students should be given ample time to prepare for their presentation. During this time, they should be

choosing a poem to perform, identifying the different sound techniques in this poem, and reading with the appropriate expression, intonation, and pace based on the rhythm and tone of the poem. They can practice reading to peers, with the teacher, at home, and into a tape recorder. Hopefully they will practice so much that memorization will not be an issue, but more timid or less proficient students should be given the option to use a script. More creative students may want to incorporate props and/or costumes for their presentation, but I do not think this should be a requirement.

You can structure the presentation however you would like. I believe this would be an opportunity to invite families and/or other classes to participate. Before students recite their poem, you might encourage them to give a brief overview of the topic, tone, and sound devices used in their poem. Appendix C contains a rubric that can be used to evaluate the student's presentation of the poem and whether s/he incorporated the concepts covered in this unit. Most importantly, have fun! Take this opportunity to celebrate student progress and achievement, and create an experience for your students that they will remember for the rest of their lives.

Endnotes

- 1 Alarcón, Francisco X. "Ode to Buena Vista Bilingual School." *Iguanas in the Snow and other Winter Poems* . 14.
- 2 Holbrook, Sara. *Practical Poetry: A Nonstandard Approach to Meeting Content-Area Standards* . 8.
- 3 Crevola, Carmel and Mark Vineis. *Let's Talk About It- Oral Language Reading and Writing* .
- 4 Spiegel, Dixie Lee. "Materials to Introduce Children to Poetry." 1.
- 5 Risley, Todd .R. and Hart, Betty. "Promoting Early Language Development," 4.
- 6 Haynes, Julie. "Stages of Second Language Acquisition."
- 7 Sloan, Genna. *Give Them Poetry!: A Guide for Sharing Poetry with Children K-8*. 11.
- 8 Fleischman, Paul. *Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices*. 32.
- 9 Sidman, Joyce. "Budgie Babies." *Just Us Two: Poems about Dads*. 12.
- 10 Prelutsky, Jack. "Jellyfish Stew." *The New Kid on the Block*. 8.
- 11 Greenfield, Eloise. "Rope Rhyme." *Honey I Love and Other Love Poems* . 15.
- 12 Greenfield, Eloise. "Things." *Honey I Love and Other Love Poems* . 17.
- 13 Frost, Robert. "The Last Refinement of Subject Matter: Vocal Imagination" in *The Collected Prose of Robert Frost*.
- 14 Greenfield, Eloise. "I Look Pretty." *Honey I Love and Other Love Poems* . 10.
- 15 Prelutsky, Jack. "Snowman's Lament." *It's Snowing! It's Snowing!* 44.
- 16 Arnstein, Flora J. *Adventure into Poetry* . 3.

Appendix A: Implementing District Standards

- CC.1.R.L.4: Identify words and phrases in stories or poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses

Through this unit, students will discuss the meaning behind the poems they read, and which words the poets chose to convey an emotion or appeal to the five senses.

- CC.1.R.L.6: Identify who is telling the story at various points in the text

Along with the tone of the poem, students will identify the point of view of the speaker.

- CC.1.R.L.10: With prompting and support, read prose and poetry of appropriate complexity for grade 1.

Students will have many opportunities to read poems individually, chorally, with a partner, and with teacher and/or parent support.

- CC.1.R.F.2: Demonstrate understanding of spoken words, syllables, and sounds (phonemes)

Poems can be used not only for comprehension and craft analysis, but with an emphasis on phonics and phonemic awareness, as when studying alliteration and rhyme.

- CC.1.R.F.3.c: Use knowledge that every syllable must have a vowel sound to determine the number of syllables in a printed word

Syllables will be discussed when studying rhythm, and determining where the stressed syllables occur.

- CC.1.R.F.4: Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.

Especially when preparing for their presentation of their poem, students will practice reading their poetry accurately and with appropriate rhythm and speed.

- CC.1.R.F.4.b: Read grade-level text orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression.

Again, students will spend ample time perfecting their reading of a specific poem, focusing on rate, expression, and tone.

- CC.1.L.5.c: Identify real-life connections between words and their use (e.g., note places at home that are cozy)

Studying poetry will give students many opportunities to learn new vocabulary and discuss real-life connections.

Appendix B: Graphic Organizer (objective to be completed by teacher before photocopying)

Name: _____ Date: _____

Objective: _____

Title of poem: _____

Author of poem: _____

Examples of _____ used in poem:

This poem makes me think: _____

Rate this poem: 😊 😐 😞

Why? _____

Appendix C: Graphic organizer for poem chosen for presentation (end of unit assessment)

Name: _____ Date: _____

Title of poem: _____

Author of poem: _____

This poem has (check all that apply and provide examples):

Alliteration: _____

Onomatopoeia: _____

Rhyme: _____




Repetition: _____

Rhythm

What is this poem mostly about? _____

Explain the tone of this poem: _____

Appendix D: Rubric to grade presentation of poems

	1	2	3
Name of Student: Title of Poem:			
Analysis of Poem: Did you identify the sound devices used in the poem? Did you explain the tone of the poem? Did you discuss the main idea?			
Presentation of Poem: Did your reading of the poem capture its rhythm? Did you read with the appropriate tone?			

Resources

Bibliography for Teachers:

Arnstein, Flora J. *Adventure into Poetry*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1951. This book is the account of the author's experiences using poetry in the classroom, encouraging students to think and express themselves creatively.

Crevola, Carmel and Mark Vineis. *Let's Talk About It- Oral Language Reading and Writing*. New York: MONDO, 2005. Oral language research and teaching strategies from the Mondo literacy curriculum used in the New Haven Public Schools.

Duthie, Christine and Ellie Kubie Zimet. "Poetry is like Directions for Your Imagination!" *The Reading Teacher* 46, no. 1 (1992): 14-24. This article describes a poetry writing unit carried out in a first grade classroom in Trumansburg, New York with an emphasis on students' creating personal poetry anthologies.

Frost, Robert. "The Last Refinement of Subject Matter: Vocal Imagination" in *The Collected Prose of Robert Frost*. Mark Richardson, ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007. An essay on the relationship between words and meaning as created through the tone of the poem.

Garfield, Sara. "Building Self-Esteem Through Poetry." *The Reading Teacher* 44, no. 8 (1991): 616-617. This article outlines a number of poems teachers can write with students to highlight positive qualities and build self-esteem in the classroom.

Haynes, Julie. "Stages of Second Language Acquisition." 1998. http://www.everythingsl.net/in-services/language_stages.php (accessed April 2, 2011). This web entry clearly outlines the stages of language development and the phases through which a child must go in gaining second language proficiency.

Holbrook, Sara. *Practical Poetry: A Nonstandard Approach to Meeting Content-Area Standards*. Heinemann: Portsmouth, 2005. This book looks at how teachers can use poetry to address content-area standards in literacy, mathematics, science, and social studies.

Koch, Kenneth. *Rose, Where Did You Get That Red?*. 1 ed. New York: Random House, 1973. One of the first books written on teaching poetry in the elementary grades, a useful look at poetry reading and writing units using a variety of well-known poets' work.

Kovalcik, Beth and Janine L. Certo. "The Poetry Cafe Is Open! Teaching Literary Devices of Sound in Poetry Writing." *The Reading Teacher* 61, no. 1 (2007): 89-93. An article outlining a poetry writing unit with an emphasis on sound devices.

Risley, Todd .R. and Hart, Betty. "Promoting Early Language Development," in *The*

Crisis in Youth Mental Health: Critical Issues and Effective Programs, ed. N.F. Watt, C. Ayoub, R.H. Bradley, J.E. Puma, and W. A. LeBoeuf (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), 4. This is the famous study identifying the gap in early language development and vocabulary between children growing up in impoverished and wealthier homes.

Sloan, Genna. *Give Them Poetry!: A Guide for Sharing Poetry with Children K-8*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2003. A wonderful book providing rationale for teaching poetry in the elementary grades as well as ideas for lessons on reading and writing poetry.

Spiegel, Dixie Lee. "Materials to Introduce Children to Poetry." *The Reading Teacher* 44, no. 6 (1991): 428-429. This article examines the characteristics of high-quality children's poetry and provides guidelines on how to choose useful resources.

Reading List for Students:

Alarcón, Francisco X. *Laughing Tomatoes and Other Spring Poems* . San Francisco: Children's Book Press, 1997. A visually stimulating collection of bilingual poems related to springtime.

Alarcón, Francisco X. *Iguanas in the Snow and Other Winter Poems* . San Francisco: Children's Book Press, 2001. A visually stimulating collection of bilingual poems related to winter.

Arco Iris de Poesía. Sergio Adricáin. New York: Lectorum, 2008. A collection of bilingual poems by Latin American poets.

Calmenson, Stephanie. *Kindergarten Kids* . New York: Harper Collins, 2005. Cute and fun poems with heavy emphasis on rhyme.

Fleischman, Paul. *Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices* . New York: Harper Collins, 1988. Poems written to be performed by two speakers, all related to insects and other garden critters. Audio recordings of some of these poems are available online at

www.recordedbooks.com

Greenfield, Eloise. *Honey I Love and Other Love Poems*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1978. Wonderful collection of poems with real-life relevance for young students; poems include all of the sound devices discussed in this unit.

Prelutsky, Jack. *It's Snowing! It's Snowing!*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1984. Rhyming, silly poems all about snow and winter themes.

Prelutsky, Jack. *The New Kid on the Block*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1984. Whimsical poems, usually rhyming, written through the eyes of the child.

Prelutsky, Jack. *My Dog May be a Genius*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 2008. See above.

Radley, Gail. *Rainy Day Rhymes*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998 . Another collection of rhyming children's poems, with a "rain" theme.

Sidman, Joyce. *Just Us Two: Poems about Dads*. Brookfield: Millbrook Press, 2003. Very cute and educational poems about animals

that rely on the father's taking care of his young; also employs many sound techniques.

The Random House Book of Poetry for Children. ed. Jack Prelutsky. New York: Random House, 1983. Anthology of poems by a wide range of poets.

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