



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2011 Volume III: The Sound of Words: An Introduction to Poetry

A Study of Poetry in Middle School

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by Elizabeth Trojanowski

Introduction

Suniti Namjoshi, an Indian poet and writer, said, "Poetry is the sound of the human animal." Namjoshi delves into two important ideas here. The first is that poetry is somehow a visceral experience implying that poetry is instinctive and that every person has this innate ability. This will give confidence to apprehensive students who may have poetry anxiety. Second, Namjoshi emphasizes a component of poetry that is often overlooked, sound. In his "Essay on Criticism," Alexander Pope writes, "The *Sound* must seem an *Echo* to the *Sense*" indicating that the sound of a line within a poem should implicate the meaning of the text. Along with other style devices, students will give sound to their poetry as a further component of the sense that they are trying to convey in their poetry. It is in these two ways that this quote becomes our inspiration in this unit. Students will use the crafts learned in each lesson to answer the question: "How can you express your human animal in words, sounds, and emotion?" Middle school students are unique in their own way and, as teenagers, need confidence to find their inner creature and give it voice in a positive, safe place. This unit intends to unleash that animal from within students through a poetic unit seeded in Language Arts skills but nourished by imagination and sound.

One may ask: Why study poetry and not a coming of age novel or short stories students can relate to? Poetry provides many practical applications for middle school adolescents who, very often, lack motivation. Chiefly, poetry is appealing for many reasons including length. Prose can be complex and extensive; however, poetry is short making it easier to see the text as a whole. Therefore, it encourages deeper investigation and allows students to weigh each word or phrase. Poetry is replete with figurative language and sounds that convey a multi-layered meaning adding a sense of mystery and understanding. Middle school students can also personally connect to the emotions provoked in many poems. Often a poem becomes a visceral experience for students, as indicated by Namjoshi, awakening deeper understandings within the kids. Poetry can even be a mnemonic device to help in other subjects. Therefore, by studying the patterns of sounds in poetry and practicing the creation of these patterns, students will learn a skill useful throughout their educational careers.

Through the years, I have noticed many of my students lack the skills to turn their words into poetry. As the demands of Language Arts teachers grow due to standardized testing, they are forced to focus on what are determined to be the "most valuable skills" in order to pass the Connecticut Mastery Tests. Specific skills which help to form a general understanding of the text, develop interpretations from the text, make

connections to the text, and examine the content and structure of the text have been the concentration. Although author's craft is studied within examining the content and structure of a text, often the style devices are omitted or saved until last due to all of the students' other academic needs. Sound and tone are poetic topics that are never even reached even though they are fundamental to expression and comprehension. This is a growing problem every year and has been evident through the classroom assessments I have given to my students. This curriculum unit will teach students to use style devices such as simile, metaphor, alliteration, hyperbole, onomatopoeia, etc. in a natural way in their writing without necessarily terming these crafts until the end of the unit. I intend not only to concentrate on the proper use of such tools. I also want students to understand how other authors use them. I plan to use model poems as well as songs to show their effective use.

Besides the many different tools students have to use in order to help create or enhance their poetry, such as word use, figurative language, and the like, one of the most prevalent yet unassuming devices available to students studying poetry falls upon deaf ears. That device – sound, is one of the most unconcealed components of the art of poetry and yet one of the most elusive. The deliberate tone used to communicate the poetry expresses the meaning of the words. Over the years, I have taught many different lessons on the use of all the writing tools available in order to convey meaning to the reader, but I have spent little time focusing on simple sound as a way to communicate meaning. Students rarely consider the way something is read an important element to understanding the text. In the unit, students will study sound as a form of communicating ideas. Students will identify different sounds or patterns of sound in poems and words and interpret it as further analysis. We will study the difference in meaning and emotion a poem can convey when it is read in different ways.

By studying these two important elements, the analytical conventions of figurative language and the mystery and emotion of sound in poetry, this curriculum unit will attempt to inspire students to not only effectively use the tools of style available to them, but add personality to the way they express their pieces. Students will study model pieces in order to create their own repertoire of art and share these pieces of art in the safety of the classroom.

There is a new middle school Language Arts curriculum in New Haven as well. Each quarter of the school year focuses on a different genre and includes specific core texts to be used to teach particular skills. The third quarter in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade concentrates primarily on poetry and reader's theater; however, unlike the other units, this period does not include any core texts or specific poems to be studied. Not only does the curriculum not outline what to read, it also does not give a clear plan as how to teach poetry. Therefore, teachers must create their own poetic canon to be studied within the quarter and design an approach to the subject. In this sense, the curriculum is flexible and teaching can be based on kids' interests and needs.

This unit includes a new, yet classic, poetic canon of works to be used as models to help develop students' poetic aspirations. It will initiate an open mic forum where students can give voice to their poems in order to exhibit mastery of all the tools mentioned as well as present the sounds of their poetry. It is also in this forum that students will be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of the melodic harmony within their pieces and identify the message that those pieces may convey. By understanding the significance of expression in poetry, the unit establishes the impact of sound in poetry.

Objectives of the Unit

The unit that follows will first and foremost teach middle school students to view themselves as poets. In order for students to have the courage to share the sounds of their inner animal, they must feel like a beast worthy of sharing. It is critical to boost students' confidence and create a safe environment for them to blossom as writers/readers. Students will develop a repertoire of authentic poems in their writing notebooks. No poet has only a single poem. Poets must have a collection of poems that can show growth from one to the next as well as a stock of poems on different themes and topics and in varying forms. Students will be able to add style to their lines and descriptions through the use of a variety of style devices such as simile, metaphor, alliteration, repetition, onomatopoeia, and personification. Students will also be able to discuss the impact of the style devices on the way poems sound. How will a reader know what the poem is supposed to sound like? How will the reader know how to read the poem? Students will also be able to identify rhythmic patterns in a poem and create their own rhythm in their poetry to establish a deeper understanding through sound. Students will also establish a list of interesting and unique words through word exchanges. Students will use interesting words, style devices, and sound effectively to write and share poetry in an open mic forum.

A Note about Grading in Poetry, Homework, and Sharing

Can art be right or wrong? Can one's inner thoughts, feelings, and imagination be correct or incorrect? I believe the answer is a direct and final no. Kenneth Koch, an author and poet who taught poetry to students in New York City, agrees. Koch, who I frequently refer to, found himself in a similar situation to myself and many of my colleagues in the inner city. He has written several books on his experience teaching diverse learners and explains excellent strategies to use in order to help engage writers out of their shells. However, unlike many other teachers/authors who explain interesting strategies that may work, Koch publishes his students' poetry in his books, and the proof of his success, so to speak, is in the pudding. After reading his students' poems, it is easy to see that his strategies work.

Koch writes, "The teacher shouldn't correct a child's poems either." ¹To ask questions in order to clarify or encourage the use of new and interesting words is fine. I keep a pile of thesauruses and dictionaries in the front of the room and promote their constant use in class. It even makes an excellent word exchange mini-lesson. Ask students to revise a work of poetry by selecting one poem they have written and circling boring or common words (words that are frequently used and therefore lack uniqueness). For example in a line such as "Roses are red," the word red is a bit lifeless and vague. Ask students to look it up in the thesaurus. Words such as crimson, scarlet, or ruby are unique and rarely used, making the line more interesting. The words that students find can be added to a class word wall where words are exchanged for use in their pieces. I also suggest adding a revision stage to the poetry writing workshops where students can recommend new words to one another. However, never should a student's poem be marked wrong or imprinted with a heartbreaking, red F. If it is found that students continuously use the same monotonous words over and over such as nice, good, etc. simply ban their use in class. Similar to curse words, these are words I and my students have decided to prohibit and students must find a more precise word to suit their purpose in their text. "The child's poem should be all his own," adds Koch; "to change it in order to make it meet one's own standards" is not

appropriate. ²

Although sometimes a necessary evil, try to stay away from assigning poetry writing as homework. There are some students who, once they've found the pleasure in it, do enjoy writing poetry for homework; however, most students despise homework and by associating poetry with the revolting idea of homework, the association becomes another strong barrier to overcome. As Koch found, "Once it had to be done away from school, poetry was part of the detestable category of 'homework,' which cuts one off from the true pleasures in life; whereas in school it was a welcome relief from math, spelling, and other required subjects." ³ Language Arts becomes a quick favorite even for the most restless students. There's also something to be said for everyone in class being in the same boat and writing together. Koch writes, "No time for self-consciousness or self-doubts," because there is just too much activity. ⁴ Students are also there to help and hear one another. That said, there is no reason to discourage poetry writing at home, simply do not force it upon students.

One of the major components of this unit is learning to share poetry in order to hear how sound is used to echo or enhance comprehension. It is urgent to nurture a secure and relaxed classroom environment where students feel safe in sharing their own poetry as well as reading others. It has never been my style to force anyone to read aloud their work; however, I think it's important enough to make it a goal for each student to have an opportunity to share his or her work with the class. While reading model poems, ask each student in class to read 1 or 2 lines in the poems as in a collective reading. This way, anxious students can prepare ahead of time and will not feel singled out. By practicing daily, even apprehensive students will begin to feel comfortable in sharing work. Also, asking other students to read someone else's work out loud can help in hearing the sounds of the poem. Make the open mic available on a consistent basis so that everyone can contribute in sharing.

Cracking the Shell of the Poet

While studying poetry in the past, I found that my students are usually divided into two groups: those who love to write poetry but remain within the sing-song confounds of rhyme and rhythm forced on them by years of elementary teachers confined to simply teach basic poetry through nursery rhymes or Dr. Suess (not that there's anything wrong with either) and those who have consistently failed at writing on the Connecticut Mastery Tests as well as other classes and believe themselves to be terrible at writing and therefore refuse to even attempt poetry. They seemingly try to avoid the failure; however, in their minds, they've failed before they've even begun, therefore not avoiding anything. Needless to say, neither group of students view themselves as poets, much less authors.

It is essential to begin such a unit by initially assessing students' skills. Introduce Suniti Namjoshi's quote, "Poetry is the sound of the human animal." Ask students what they think this means. Point out that within each person, there lies a shadow of a creature. Make a list of well known people like performers, athletes, or popular singers (students can make a list of teachers and administrators as well; however, this has the potential to get inappropriate). Ask students to write which animals each of these people seem to strongly connect to. Then ask students to write down which animal they relate to the most.

Use William Blake's "The Tyger" as a model. Discuss the questions Blake asks of the animal in the poem. What questions might they ask of the animals that represent them? What responses might the animals provide? Ask

students to describe the animals and their connections to the creature in a poem. They may pretend to be the animal and begin the poems with "I am a..." or they may be speaking with the animal asking it questions as Blake does. Allow students to go wherever the poems take them. In other words, there should be no rules or specific forms for these poems. Use these poems as a starting point to assess students' comfort levels with style devices, sound, word choice, and rhythm. While reading the poems, either personally or during a classroom share, point out natural use of any of these skills.

Meanwhile, I turn again to Koch who found that "Children can be fine musicians when the barriers of meter and rhyme aren't put in their way." ⁵ Koch specifically notes that although rhyme is a wonderful tool, "children generally aren't able to use it skillfully enough to make good poetry. It gets in their way." ⁶ I found this to be true in my classroom as well. My students had been able to write lines that had rhyme but little depth, and whenever they tried to give the poems depth and meaning, the rhymes impeded their thoughts. Koch writes, "The effort of finding rhymes stops the free flow of their feelings and associations, and poetry gives way to sing-song." ⁷ Rather than encumber students with rules or forms, he initiated his poetry lesson with a collaborative poem including one line from each child beginning with "I Wish" followed by individual poems using the same line. They could be real or crazy but they were not to have rhyme. Begin with this assignment, first a collective "I Wish" poem written by the class. Then ask students to write their own "I Wish" poems.

Here Koch makes one point very clear on the subject of language: the choice of words during instruction must be conducive to the students. In other words, the "I Wish" poems he asked of his students would not have been as successful if he had asked for students to begin the line with "I desire." He says, "The various poetry ideas should be presented in words children actually use." ⁸ One has to know the students well enough to be able to decide which words will be familiar and comfortable and which words will be construed as "teacher talk." He notes an example from one teacher who asked students to begin every line with "Love is" and found the students hadn't responded wholeheartedly and the assignment flopped. ⁹ Very often students are expected to have an idea of these adult concepts; however, they haven't had enough personal experiences to develop original ideas of these concepts. It is essential to put yourself in these innocent shoes no matter how mature the students may come across.

Writing a class poem accomplishes two goals: it takes the pressure off of apprehensive students to turn a blank page into a work of poetic art and makes it a collective and cooperative piece, and it eliminates the distraction of rhyming. To get this activity going, ask students to complete the "I Wish" line, collect them, and while students are considering their own "I Wish" poems, put the lines together in a thoughtful way. When sharing, ask each student to read only one line of the poem while remaining at their seats (each student will likely read someone else's line). Display the poem somewhere in the classroom. Then ask students to share their own "I Wish" poems.

The poems written in Koch's classroom had repetitive sounds which, inconspicuously, gave the poems form and unity without the boundaries of rhyme and meter. In fact, each line gave students a break from reality because they could extend beyond their wildest dreams, and it allowed them to start from scratch at each line, carefully peeling away any hesitation or insecurity. In Koch's words, the lines the students wrote "had a lovely music." ¹⁰ He had stumbled upon an unobtrusive path into a child's natural poetic soul and found a way for the child to bring that to paper. This is what true poetry is all about. In this way, we can help students to see inside their souls and find a way to express that and, in turn, help them become poets.

As I mentioned, Koch's books are rich with poetry, not classical or well-known, but poems from his own students. Often many of these poems do not have titles, so I refer to the first line as the title of the poem

similar to the poetry of Emily Dickinson. In Koch's book *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams*, Andrew Barish provides an excellent example of a wish poem "I wish I could find a chest full of money."¹¹ This poem is lush with imagery, onomatopoeia, and other style devices to point out. Erin Harold writes a great example of how repetitive sounds provide structure in "Sometimes I wish I had my own kitten."¹² These are just two examples; however, the book is filled with many more.

One great classic poem to introduce at this time is "Sea Fever" by John Masefield. This poem discusses a longing desire and simultaneously produces a natural rhythm that echoes the sea. Point out in stanza 1 the rhythm of words and lines as they are each divided and almost mimic the sound of the waves coming in and out:

I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by,
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sail's shaking,
And a grey mist on the sea's face and a grey dawn breaking.

Note the author's use of repetition throughout the poem. Try to connect the ideas of longing in the poem with the "I Wish" poems as well as the use of repetition. Ask students if the ocean has some form of repetition. Notice the pattern repeats in the poem just like the ocean waves. Point out the sound of the poem. Ask students to hum the sounds of the words rather than the actual words. Ask students if they hear any sounds being repeated. Again, notice how the sounds of the words seem to roll back in each line, almost like the ocean. Be sure the students become aware of the alliteration in the lines such as in line 1: seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky. This continues into line 2: star to steer her by. Try to find some alliteration in their "I Wish" poems. Very often alliteration comes very naturally to children and is organically intertwined in their lines. For instance lines starting with "I wish I was..." are almost inherent in such poems.

It is vital to consistently point out the poetic style devices purposely used in Masefield's famous poem are also found in their own poetry. By making these parallels to classic poets, you will help students begin to see themselves as poets as well.

Another excellent poem to discuss repetition is "At the Zoo" by William Makepeace Thackeray. He begins his first line with "First I saw..." then continues each successive line with "Then I saw..." He too demonstrates, like Masefield, the use of alliteration and also brings in color. It is a great lead into the next practice in poetry writing - "Color" poems.

Words have Sound

Ask students what do words sound like? In other words, what sound do words inspire? What feelings do we associate with certain words? What sounds do we associate with certain words? The sound of the word "depressed" is different from the sound of the word "gloomy". The sound of the word "cloud" is different from the sound of the word "blue". It is necessary to have a discussion of the sound of words in order to begin to use sound as a tool in poetry writing. Students must carefully select each word they include in a work; therefore, understanding the sound connotation of a word is an important conversation. It is essential here to take a moment in the form of a mini-lesson to hear how someone says certain words. Partner students in pairs and provide them with a list of words. Ask students to say these words to each other. Ask students to add words to the lists and say them aloud to the class. Have students create a "Sound Wall" instead of the usual word wall. Add categories of words to the wall like loud words, soft words, nasally words, etc.

While on the subject of sound, what would "Noise" poems be without sounds? DO NOT call it onomatopoeia, but instead motivate students to write what they hear. Create different sounds in the room and ask students to write what they hear. Koch suggests crumpling up paper or hitting a ruler on a chair. Ask students to close their eyes and say what they hear as you create the sound. When students come up with a sound, create the same sound again and ask students to say what actual words the sound sounds like instead of the sound word. The idea is to create an association between words and sounds. Working in groups, ask students to make a list of various words on charts such as wet words, rocky words, bouncy words, slow words, fast words, etc. Put up the charts around the classroom so students may use them in their poems.

In Koch's example, he hit a chair with a ruler, and students said it sounded like "tap" and when he repeated the sound and asked students to listen for words it sounded like but did not have anything to do with "tap", they responded with "Hat, snap, trap, glad, badger" ¹³. Each of these words elicited their own sounds and had their own relationships with the chair. When students recognize the sound of words and the impact it can make on the poem, they begin to scrutinize each word and become more selective and descriptive. Koch explains "Before they had experimented with the medium of poetry in this way, what the children wrote tended to be a little narrow and limited in its means - but not afterwards. Their writing quickly became richer and more colorful." ¹⁴ Using these brainstorming activities, students should write Noise poems.

Several poems in Koch's book provide excellent examples of the sounds of words such as Ana Gomes' poem called "Sounds." ¹⁵ An unknown author writes "Form a circle with your mouth" providing beautiful analogies of sounds. ¹⁶ In one example in the poem, the author notes, "A baby's cry/ Will warn of disaster/ It sounds like an air raid/ So you better be aware!" ¹⁷ This is an excellent example of how sounds connect to feelings or emotions.

An excellent model poem to use here is Lewis Carroll's poem "Beautiful Soup". The poem plays with the sounds of words and even takes sound to the next level by giving visual queues to the reader. Adding a quick mini-lesson on some of these visual queues such as capitalization and the impact it makes in this poem is quite helpful to students. Notice in line 1 the word "BEAUTIFUL" is in caps. Ask students why the author chose to do this? Also, note in latter lines in stanza 2:

Beau--ootiful Soo--oop!

Beau--ootiful Soo--oop!
Soo--oop of the e--e--evening,
Beautiful, beautiful Soup!

The author extends certain sounds. Ask students about the impact of such directions. What connections might it inspire? What sounds emanate from the poem adding to the sense and bridging to the words? For instance, "Soo--oop" adds a slurping sound referring to eating.

Another great model here is "Someone" by Walter De la Mare. His lines "Only the busy beetle/ Tap-tapping in the wall" and "The screech owl's call" really demonstrate the sounds of words well. His final lines "So I know not who came knocking/ At all, at all, at all" mimic the knocking sound without really using sound words at all.

While students practice writing "Noise" poems, they may also consider the metric patterns in the poems; however, it does not need to be a focus. These poems should most definitely be shared with the class.

In much the same way as words have sounds, they have colors as well. Ask students what color is the sound of the ruler hitting the chair or the color of days of the week. Ask students to write "Color" poems. Each line of the poem should contain a color or the same color. Koch especially encouraged students to write one color poem where everything in the poem was the same shade of a color or the same color ¹⁸. Ask students what are the sounds of different colors? Can the two, color and sound, be intertwined?

One poem that works well as a model here is Walter De la Mare's poem "Silver". His vivid images haunt the reader with a visual and sound element – "Slowly, silently, now the moon/ Walks the night in her silver shoon". The poem has incredible use of imagery, alliteration, sound, and personification (which can be discussed now or later while reading Wordsworth's "Daffodils").

In Koch's book, one excellent example of a color poem belongs to Charles Conroy. Conroy's poem "What Shall I Chartreuse Today" provides vivid images that bring each color to life. He masterfully uses personification, sound, and metaphors to thread colors and their meaning. For instance, he writes, "Or I could red John in the nose" and "I put a green croak in Pinky's bed." ¹⁹ This poem is full of discussion opportunities for the classroom.

Lines have Sound and Pattern

How does a reader know what a line should sound like? Here it is important to point out yet another tool available to a poet – metric pattern. Perfected by William Shakespeare in his sonnets, one of the most well known patterns in poetry is iambic pentameter. Begin by asking students to read Shakespeare's Sonnet #18. Read the poem collectively and ask each student to read one line. When students are through, ask them how they knew how to read the lines. How did they know what the words should sound like? How each line should sound? Re-read the first line adding accent to the wrong places for example:

/ ^ / ^ / ^ / ^ / ^

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

Ask students how they knew this sounded wrong. Then follow up with what it should sound like. Write the sentence on the board with the appropriate accents above each syllable for an iamb (^ /).

^ / ^ / ^ / ^ / ^ /

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

Re-read the line again adding appropriate accents to stressed and unstressed syllables. Practice labeling stressed and unstressed syllables to different words such as names. For instance, my name is Elizabeth Trojanowski.

^ / ^ // ^ / ^

E - liz - a - beth Tro - jan - ow - ski

Ask students to practice with their own names. Then continue to mark the accents above each line in the poem. Explain to students that each unstressed and stressed syllable together equals an iamb. Ask students to count the number of iambs in each line. Explain that the iambs in each line equal a meter. This particular pattern is iambic pentameter because there are 5 iambs in the meter. Shakespeare's Sonnet #138 is also an excellent example of this brief metric study. Ask students to write a poem in iambic pentameter together.

Begin with writing 4 made up lines on the board (invite students to contribute some lines). Add stressed and unstressed marks to each syllable. Revise each line together as a class adding or removing lines in order to add the appropriate number of stressed and unstressed syllables to each line. Ask students to attempt writing authentic poetry in iambic pentameter. Avoid asking students to put such pattern and form limitations on all their poems. This may inhibit many writers.

It is important to know your students well at this point. Although it is important to study the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in metered lines, it is not essential to continue this study. Learning about other patterns such as trochees, dactyls, etc. may be included when there is additional time and if you feel your students are ready to explore more patterns of rhythm. However, such a study is not necessary at this time.

Style/Craft Devices

Koch took a backdoor approach to teaching the conventions of style devices as well. He found that repetition came naturally to children and realized that other poetic crafts could authentically emerge as well if presented in the right way. In the past, I've shown students examples of figurative language such as similes and have given them definitions. I tried visuals along with numerous examples. Some students got it eventually; however, when asked to create their own examples, they wrote similes such as "she was as tall as my sister" or "he was mean like my neighbor." Students were so preoccupied with fitting the form that the poetic spirit

was not there. The same students who were intimidated by poetry writing became paralyzed when introduced to crafts such as similes. It was just too difficult. Koch insists that "Poetry should be talked about in a simple a way was possible and certainly without such bewildering rhetorical terms as alliteration, simile, and onomatopoeia." ²⁰ There is a time and place for the labels of particular devices, but that time does not come before students can weave them, sometimes unknowingly, into their lines in an authentic way. Koch indicates, "Poetry is a mystery, but it is a mystery children can participate in and master, and they shouldn't be kept away from it by hard words." ²¹

Koch asked students to write comparison poems; he specifically asked them to make strange comparisons. He explains he encouraged students to take chances and "suggested they compare something big to something small, something in school to something out of school, something unreal to something real, something human to something not human." ²² His intention was "to rouse them out of the timidity [he] felt they had about being 'crazy' or 'silly' in front of an adult in school." ²³ Similes without imagination often cannot work and encouraging nonsensical poems is necessary in freeing imagination. Students need sanctuary from the right and wrong of Connecticut Mastery Testing practice and test preparation. They need to feel safe and comfortable without the fear of judgment or grades. When they are outside of these confines, they become uninhibited; therefore, they are able to make unusual connections. As Koch notes, very often these curious comparisons can lead to extraordinary insights. His technique was as follows:

I held up a piece of chalk, a sheet of paper, a notebook, and asked them to compare each to something which was like it only in one way and not in others: the chalk is like a snowy mountain. I told them to hold their hands in front of their eyes and look at the sky. How big was their hand? As big as the sky. Many comparisons, I said, sounded wrong but were actually right in some way. I asked them to compare little things to big things: a mouse is like an elephant; and things in school to things outside school: the blackboard is as green as the sky. I asked them to compare two things that they thought were not alike at all and then see what they felt about it: rain is like a cemetery. ²⁴

This technique can pay off two-fold. Not only can students create remarkably clever comparisons, the discussions that follow can be very insightful. Don't forget to refer to Shakespeare's Sonnet #18. Not only did Shakespeare masterfully use metric pattern, but his poem is one long, unusual comparison – a person to a summer's day. He goes on to explain his comparison in every line. This is an excellent model to use in this lesson because students are already familiar with the poem and the comparison is obvious from the initial line, which begs the reader to question how does the person compare?

In much the same way, Koch introduced metaphors; however, metaphors seemed to be a bigger and more difficult task than the comparison poems. He attributes this to the fact that "it isn't as natural to children to make metaphors as to make comparisons; metaphors require an extra act of thought."²⁵ To get around this problem, ask students to write, again, comparison poems but this time removing the words as or like. A great poem format that can work here is "I am" poems. Ask students to complete the line. Another form that works well here is starting each even line with "I used to be" and starting each odd line with "But now I'm." Encourage students to continuously use all the tools and techniques discussed in all their poetry.

Similes and metaphors are difficult to understand especially when dealing with students who are on a lower reading level. As I mentioned, many of my students are at basic or below on the Connecticut Mastery Tests or are learning English as a second language, so figurative language is very difficult to understand since many of them are dealing primarily with the literal. The following exercise is one that can be done for additional practice with students who need the extra work. It is called "Pimp the Lyrics." Refer to the television show "Pimp my Ride." Ask students what it means to pimp my ride and what do the producers of the show do in order to pimp a ride? Connect this to pimping lyrics. In other words, rather than simply stating the basic words to express something, tell students to express it using metaphors and similes. Use lyrics in rap or other songs to show how many artists use similes and metaphors to pimp their lyrics. Find examples of similes and metaphors in current songs to show as models. Some examples I found include lyrics from artists such as 50 Cent, Eminem, Smashing Pumpkins, and The Black-Eyed Peas. When revealing the lyrics, only show the line that includes the figurative language avoiding, very often, inappropriate words or lyrics. On the board, write only what the artist meant. For instance, ask students who said, "I am very trendy" and how did they say it? Ask students to pimp the lyrics "I am very trendy." Ask students what they can compare a trendy person to? Give students time and then share examples. Then reveal the real artist and the way the lyrics are really sung. In this case, "I am very trendy" is pimped by the Black-Eyed Peas singing "I'm so 3008, you so 2008, I got that boom, boom, boom." This can also be done in reverse by students reading the pimped lyrics and trying to write what the author is actually saying.

William Wordsworth's "Daffodils" lends itself well to comparison poetry. His poem also does yet another thing that students can do well once introduced to it: personification. He speaks of "the daffodils" as a "crowd fluttering and dancing in the breeze." The daffodils come to life "Tossing their heads in a sprightly dance." Wordsworth makes the unthinkable happen almost as if in a dream. This lends itself well to the next poetic theme: "Dream" poems. Children have marvelous dreams and sometimes these dreams don't make sense so their poems don't have to as Koch pointed out to his students.²⁶

Ask students to write "Dream" poems which should include similes and metaphors and may include some of the other crafts learned in past lessons. Always share poems and invite students to suggest areas where students can "pimp the lines" in revision.

Koch's students provide beautiful examples of metaphors. Tomas Torres' "Blank is Blank" gives several funny and interesting comparisons such as "Mrs. Wiener is a lovely flower which shouts."²⁷ An unknown author writes "Traffic" where he/she includes great similes such as in the line "The sound of horns sounds like the striking of a xylophone."²⁸ Consider reading a poem without similes or metaphors and invite students to offer suggestions as to how they may revise some of the lines. This is a wonderful opportunity to teach students the value of critiquing someone's work as a class without worrying about any student feeling affronted.

The Human Animal

In the final poem of the unit, students must refer back to the original quote by Suniti Namjoshi, "Poetry is the sound of the human animal." Considering all that they have learned, students must write a final "Animal" poem. Taking into account the various techniques, crafts, and sounds students have learned, they are to reconsider the form of their inner creature and write from its perspective.

An excellent way to inspire students is by taking an outing to a zoo or aquarium or even a museum like the Peabody and exploring different creatures. Ask students what size are their inner beasts? What do they sound like? What colors do they have? How do they make sound? What movements do they make? What descriptions can they include? What do they survive on? How do they connect to it? How does it survive? What can it be compared to? In answering these questions, students can connect to their inner human animal and begin to tame it to paper. This final poem, which will blossom from all the other skills we've practiced, will answer all these guiding questions.

The model poems to use here will be "Anteater" by Shel Silverstein, "Little Trotty Wagtail" by John Clare, and "The Donkey" by G.K. Chesterton. However, in their poems, encourage students to be the animal and speak from the first person perspective rather than just observing the animal. It is natural for children to identify with animals and what better way than to be the animal. Koch writes, "Children feel close to animals and objects, close enough to talk to them, close enough to identify with them," therefore it is fun and enjoyable for students to use this fundamental poetic talent²⁹. The children are to feel the animal rather than just observe it as Koch did in his class. This poem along with others written in the unit, can be used as assessment tools during the unit study.

Additional Models

Koch provides many student samples of these poems. In *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams*, he includes his class collaboration poetry, Wishes, Dreams, Comparisons, Noises, Colors, and Being a Thing poems. The samples published in his book illustrate each type of poem and craft in real and unique ways. They are well written and fun to read. Even more importantly, they are authentic poems published in a very real book by real students in a real classroom no different from the students of New Haven. Any students with trepidations or reservations about their own ability to write or opportunity to be real authors and truly publish their work will feel less reluctance knowing that others have accomplished this before them. I have provided some suggestions of my favorites for certain topics of poems, but I do not impose any poems that must be used. I do, however, encourage teachers to use these as models for students who are struggling or need additional samples to get started. I also encourage students to read through these poems for inspiration.

Extra Activities

When students have completed their collections of poems, bring students together in an open mic forum where each student will share at least one of the poems written in the unit. This may include an audience with younger students, siblings, parents, as well as other teachers. The bigger the presentation, the more proud the students will be to perform what they have created.

Another activity that can be added is to take the "Animal" poems and cut out each line of the poem. Ask students to glue the line strips together to create a three dimensional image of the animal. These 3-D creatures will then not only represent the sound of the human animal but also image as well.

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3. Joseph, Stephen M. *The Me Nobody Knows: Children's Voices from the Ghetto* . New York: Avon Books, 1969. A collection of poetry, prose, and short narratives from children living in the slums of New York City.
4. Koch, Kenneth. *I Never Told Anybody: Teaching Poetry Writing to Old People* . New York: Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 1997. Koch, a teacher and author shares his experiences and students' poetry while teaching poetry writing to elderly people in a nursing home in New York City.
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6. Koch, Kenneth. *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams* . New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1970. Koch, a teacher and author describes his work with students at P.S. 61 in New York City, and provides various techniques to help children write poetry. He includes samples of the students' works.
7. Murdoch, Brian. *Fighting Songs and Warring Words: Popular lyrics of two World Wars* . A collection and description of poetry and lyrics written during and about World War I and World War II.
8. Silverstein, Shel. *Where the Sidewalk Ends: Poems and Drawings of Shel Silverstein* . New York: HarperCollins, 1974. A collection of poetry and illustrations for young people by Shel Silverstein.

Appendix on Common Core Standards

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading

Key Ideas and Details

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

Craft and Structure

Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing

Production and Distribution of Writing

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening

Comprehension and Collaboration

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Language

Knowledge of Language

Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

Notes

1 Koch, Kenneth, *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams* , 27.

2 Ibid, 27.

3 Ibid, 28.

4 Ibid, 29.

5 Ibid, 17.

6 Ibid, 8.

7 Ibid, 8.

8 Ibid, 28.

9 Ibid, 27.

10 Ibid, 6.

11 Ibid, 85.

12 Ibid. 78.

13 Ibid, 10.

14 Ibid, 10.

15 Ibid, 119.

16 Ibid, 123.

17 Ibid, 123.

18 Ibid, 215.

19 Ibid, 210.

20 Ibid, 26.

21 Ibid, 26.

22 Ibid, 9.

23 Ibid, 9.

24 Ibid, 105.

25 Ibid, 11.

26 Ibid, 11.

27 Ibid, 145.

28 Ibid, 125.

29 Ibid, 270.

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