



Images of the City in Modern Lyrics and Verse: A Sequential Approach to the Teaching of Poetry

Curriculum Unit 79.01.07

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UNFOLDING BUD

One is amazed

By a water-lily bud

Unfolding

With each passing day,

Taking a richer color

And new dimensions

One is not amazed,

At a first glance,

By a poem,

Which is as tight-closed

As a tiny bud.

Yet one is surprised

To see the poem

Gradually unfolding,

Revealing its rich inner self

As one reads it

Again

And over again.

Naoshi Koriyama ¹

The urban educator must be constantly attempting to integrate his or her students' environment with a diversity of new educational approaches. The purpose of this unit is to show eighth and ninth graders the importance of studying poetry from both technical and personal perspectives. By placing emphasis on twentieth-century poets and lyricists who write about city life, the unit will establish a relationship between classical forms and contemporary issues. A major goal will be to have students analyze songs, a cultural medium young people readily absorb, in comparison with a variety of poems. The students will begin to see a relationship between poetry and music. After hearing music in its familiar form, students will be asked to examine the works on paper. They will then start to see the bond between spoken poetry and lyrics read without music. What students will eventually learn is that, even without melody, lyrics can retain their meaning and rhythm.

The unit will teach students to expand and vary their use of language by beginning with their familiarity with rhythms and images in music, and culminating with an enjoyment of reading poems. Students will then be able to imitate poetic forms, think and write critically about themes, and finally translate these skills into their own creative efforts.

This unit will revolve around specific poems and songs all related to the theme of isolation and the city. Each section will stress specific poetic techniques and will include: 1. a narrative portion summarizing the particular literary devices; 2. exercises which will enable students to flex creative muscles; and 3. an appreciation/analysis component including poems and songs demonstrating those devices explained. The first chapter, "Definition of Poetry," attempts to isolate specific differences between poetry and prose forms, as well as to establish the various links between the two. The chapters that follow will each create spokes in the poetry wheel. Starting with the notion of "Word Choice," the sparks of an idea, the unit will work through the creation of a poem: "Rhythm," "Rhyme," and "Figurative Language." These sections will form a sequential curriculum which incorporates various aspects of the creative process from beginning to end. A final section will offer additional songs and poems which students can analyze utilizing all devices covered in the preceding chapters.

Although the unit does isolate the major aspects of the poetic process, it is essential to view a poem as the final reintegration of a series of interdependent processes. The rhyme scheme must mesh with the rhythm; the figurative language with the choice of a particular word or group of words. The student will experience, will rebuild a poem from its parts. Theodore Roethke's "My Papa's Waltz" will be studied for its various techniques as well as from a thematic perspective. At the end of each chapter, a few lines from the poem will be viewed and then reviewed until the piece is seen in its structural entirety. It is noteworthy that the poem not only describes an urban experience, but does so through a mixed sense perception where music, an important focus of this unit, forms the background of a meaningful memory.

Since teachers will be familiar with most terms relating to the structure of poetry, each chapter is presented as a working manual, strengthened by exercises and examples. A glossary of terms follows the unit. Poems used are listed in the bibliography under anthologies in which they can be found. A separate list of songs follows the bibliography.

While paying due respect to such devices as rhyme, the unit places a strong emphasis on figurative writing. Students must realize that a chief difference between prose and poetry is the use in poetry of images which target emotion. Young people with misconceptions about poetry must be reeducated to know that it is the creation of a good image that leads to original and fluid writing, whether poetry or prose. It is true that this unit will strive to teach the student how to shape his ideas, but first he must learn to rethink his experiences in

fresh and unique ways. A mastery of poetic appreciation and creation should lead to an increased awareness and care in all writing endeavors. Because of its limited length, a poem affords a student the opportunity to express his or her thoughts in only a few choice phrases. Learning to read with precision and to create with both imagination and skill must be the ultimate goal of a unified language curriculum.

Definition of Poetry

It has been shown that poetry is hard to define. It is even more difficult to limit. Poetry ranges from one extreme to another in idea and emotion, in music and meaning. At one extreme poetry is all sounds, at the other it is all sense. The ideal combination is the perfect union of music *and* meaning; but we often find great pleasure in poems which sing themselves into our minds without meaning much, while, on the other hand, we also enjoy poems that are not particularly musical but are extremely meaningful. ²

With the exception of drama, poetry is the only art which appeals both visually and aurally. Although it looks unique, poetry is also more closely related to our lives than any other art form. People—adults, children, teachers, students—repeat bits and pieces of verse and song that date back to earliest memories without even realizing that they have absorbed morsels of poetry.

Common experiences (including a wide range of emotional and physical activities) can be simultaneously personalized and universalized. Richard Le Galliene’s poem, “I Meant To Do My Work Today” hits home incisively for many of our students. They can identify with an organized expression of their exact thoughts:

I meant to do my work today
But a brown bird sang in the apple tree,
And a butterfly flitted across the field,
And all the leaves were calling me.
And the wind went sighing over the land,
Tossing the grasses to and fro,
And a rainbow held out its shining hand—
So what could I do but laugh and go? ³

Haven’t they, haven’t we all felt the way LeGalliene’s speaker feels? In the eight lines, rhyme and meter rule the patterning of the idea.

Poetry is also the art of condensation. Haiku, a form that uses only seventeen syllables (often in a 5-7-5 line pattern), generates a single picture or effect through limitation and selection. In only nineteen syllables, Adelaide Crapsey evokes reactions through careful word choice and rhyme:

On Seeing Weather-Beaten Trees
Is it as plainly in our living shown
By slant and twist, which way the wind hath blown? ⁴

The overall effect of a poem, therefore, depends on the pictures it generates.

Basically, then, three guidelines should be stressed when attempting to define poetry:

1. Poetry is concentrated thought that focuses our attention simultaneously on a combination of sound and idea.
2. Reading poetry must be participatory: the reader must want to express the “spirit” orally while, cooperatively, the listener must be sensitive to shades and nuances of meaning.
3. The ability to listen is an art in itself and should be cultivated. Poetry should be swallowed slowly; a leisurely reading allows time to capture the music and to grasp the significance. ⁵

Remember, also, that there are important differences between prose and poetry. Whereas prose has little or no regular rhythm, it is basic to the very nature of poetry to be rhythmic. Prose movement is irregular and cannot be diagrammed; poetry usually follows a particular measure. Lastly, the shape and structure of poetry is always patterned—even in its lack of familiar scheme. Prose has no particular pattern, even the accents and pauses are irregular and hard to determine. With poetry, line division automatically directs the eye and ear. Of course, “prose poems” must be considered poetry in the broad sense of the definition. An obvious example is Martin Luther King’s “I Have A Dream” speech, an inspired combination of repetition and metaphor. As students become more sophisticated, the teacher will probably want to point out more and more *similarities* between prose and poetry; however, as a starting point, specific elements which are distinct to each genre should be emphasized.

Poetry is an interpretive art, a work-in-progress. Each time a piece is read aloud—or heard—it is transformed into something different. The rhythms change with every voice; the figurative language and sound patterns take on new dimensions. Poetry, then, is language in motion and must be taught as a dynamic process.

Exercise: How Does A Poem Mean?

Directions In order to familiarize students with the differences between poetry and prose, give them a poem written first as a prose paragraph. Then, on a separate sheet, give them the same poem in its original form. Presuming the teacher has given students notes on differences between prose and poetry, now discuss why the second form is more effective in expressing the author’s meaning, referring to students’ notes.

Example: “I Went To The City” by Kenneth Patchen

Word Choice

Gone Forever

Halfway through shaving, it came—
the word for a poem.

I should have scribbled it
on the mirror with a soapy finger,
Or shouted it to myself till it ran
in my head like a tune.

But now it's gone with the whiskers
down the drain. Gone forever,
like the girls I never kissed,
and the places I never visited—
the lost lives I never lived.

Barriss Mills ⁶

The French painter, Degas, was also a writer of sonnets. However, he was often frustrated by his inability to achieve the desired effect.

He once complained to the poet Mallarmé, "I cannot understand it. My poems refuse to come although I am full of excellent ideas." Mallarmé, a master of written art, replied, "But my dear Degas, poetry is not written with ideas; it is written with words." ⁷ Understand that if a creative force like Degas' missed the obvious, teachers can do the same. In order to teach poetry effectively, teachers must infuse students with the ability to handle words as they do clay: shaping, adding, streamlining, completely altering their choices until the word combinations produce the desired effect.

We begin, then, with the epithet, a word which describes an object in a new and often surprising way. It particularizes the object and makes it different from any others that may “on the surface” be like it. Students must begin to see through stock combinations. But how do we break their resistance? Imagination must be dealt with as a personal issue. No image, no epithet is wrong or unusable. All minds become fertile, but the teacher must pick the fruit during the first couple of harvests. Three interesting exercises offer the student an opportunity to experiment with epithets and create imagery without having to think up his or her own words.

Exercise 1: In Search Of A Picture—The City

Directions In the column on the left are objects to which epithets have been applied; on the right the epithets used to replace them.

Match the description to the object.

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| 1. skyscraper | A. rumbling locomotive cars with horrible |
| 2. tenement | angry fronts |
| 3. small child | B. little gifts of cool spray |
| 4. garbage cans | C. dulled silver records of past life |
| 5. street gang | D. glistening towering smiling giants |
| 6. fire hydrants | E. tiny fragile plant sprouting from the pavement |
| | F. empty dirty eyes
staring down through
corroding scarred flesh |

Supplement Students should make up lists of five ordinary objects, and then recreate them using epithets.

Suddenly, objects are more than they were assumed to be. How do we arrive at these new definitions? The answer is complicated, but, for the moment, let us reduce it to a matter of feelings or impulses. Make your students aware of shades of difference in, for example, colors. Azure is not just blue; crimson is not just red; lemon is not simply yellow. The same can be done with ages (“young willow,” “old oak”), conditions (“fitful sleep,” “drug-like sleep”), or temperatures (tepid, warm, blazing, hot). The next exercise relies on free association to accomplish two things: spur students’ interest, and create a more fluid image. Similarly, in the third exercise, students are allowed to choose from a variety of words, all in a given category. Using these word choices in conjunction with the cinquain framework, students will write a second, more succinct poem.

Exercise 2: Unguarded Responses

Directions Do Not write in complete sentences, but respond in three, four, or five word phrases. Answer in any order. Use a separate sheet of paper.

1. What do you hear if you are in a car and it is raining outside?
2. What do you feel if you are standing outside in the rain?
3. Describe the odor of gasoline.

4. What sounds do you hear if you are walking with heavy boots in a deep snow? (Don't use the word "crunch.")
5. Describe the texture of skin. Feel it.
6. What does hair feel like? Anybody's hair.
7. How would you describe fear? (Think of a time you have been afraid.)
8. Describe the odor of freshly cut grass.
9. Describe the sensation of placing an ice cube against your lips.
10. Is there a particular odor in the air *before* a rainfall? Describe it.
11. Is there a particular odor in the air *after* a rainfall? Describe it.
12. If your hand slides across a piece of silky fabric, what do you feel?
13. If you were to walk barefoot down your street, what would you feel?
14. What does your hand feel like?
15. What does someone else's hand feel like? (Your mother's? Father's?)
16. Describe the taste of a lemon.
17. Describe a jet taking off.

Note In order to achieve good results with Exercise 2, students must relax. Sentence structure should be down-played with the intention of accenting good word choice. In this exercise, the entire group, smaller groups, or individuals are encouraged to respond in fragments that are then thrown together to form free association poetry. (Groups may in fact prove more successful.) All sensory-descriptive in nature, each collection of phrases is a piece of original lyric creativity. Voil^! A first poem can be produced by each student, or group of students. They are now ready to approach the cinquain.

Exercise 3: Keys To Imagination

Directions A *cinquain* is a five-line poem of two, four, six, eight, and two syllables respectively. Here is an example:

Reflections
Today
A bare stark whisp
Of all the rich days past
Why must yesterday disappear?
Alone

The cinquain is an easy and fun way to explore the limited and limitless qualities of poetry. For the moment,

however, put poetry, cinquain, everything, and everyone out of your mind. Just create!

Glance through the columns in the grid below. CHOOSE ONLY ONE ITEM FROM EACH COLUMN.

1. No rational reasons are required. The responses may be personal and impulsive. It's your choice!
2. After choosing five words, select one of the words as a theme for a cinquain. Attempt to use at least three of the circled words in your poem. GOOD LUCK!

Color	Weather	Temperature	Time	Mood
Red	Breezy	Warm	Morning	Excitable
Orange	Frosty	Hot	Evening	Calm
Pink	Humid	Cold	Later	Lazy
Yellow	Fair	Tepid	Now	Active
Gold	Dry	Cool	Night	Surprised
Green	Icy	Freezing	Day	Happy
Blue	Snowy	Steaming	Noon	Glum
Black	Mild	Lukewarm	Then	Depressed
White	Windy	Scalding	Forever	Shocked
Brown	Cloudy	Cozy	Never	Shy
Tan	Stormy	Comfortable	Sunrise	Sly
Rose	Foggy		Sunset	Shrewd
Beige	Misty		Early	Careful
Purple	Crisp		Late	Bold
				Nervous
				Peaceful
				Anxious

Appreiation/Analysis

The following questions apply to three pieces which feature interesting examples of word choice: "Motto" by Langston Hughes; "We Real Cool" by Gwendolyn Brooks; and "Play It Cool" by Stephen Sondheim (from *West Side Story*). The two poems, as well as the song, are structured around one important word: "cool." However, what students should note here are the differences in the ways "cool" is defined. Because it is a common word in urban vernacular, "cool" should be rethought by students in terms of their own usages of the word. What is synonymous with "cool"? In what diverse circumstances can the word be used? After answering the questions below, students should write a second cinquain using either "cool" plus another one-syllable word, or an equivalent two-syllable term. Their cinquains should become imagistic definitions of the expressions chosen. A discussion of connotation and denotation would be useful at this point also. See the glossary for definitions.

Questions

1. Explain how "cool" is defined in each poem. Notice that these definitions *are* different.

2. Explain how the speakers in each poem “play it cool.” In other words, what *actions* are supposed to be “cool”?
3. Try to think of one word which could be substituted for “cool” in each poem. (Two different words)
4. Find two differences in the ways the poems are punctuated. (Periods, commas, dashes) How does each mark of punctuation relate to the different versions of “cool”?
5. Why do you think Ms. Brooks has “We” at the end of each line? Why is there no “We” at the end of the last line?
6. Explain what you think “dig and be dug in return” means in “Motto.”
7. Explain what you think “dig all jive” means.
8. Try to explain the picture you get from these phrases from “We Real Cool”:
 - a. lurk late
 - b. strike straight
 - c. sing sin
 - d. thin gin
9. In your own words, explain the advice the first speaker is giving the second in “Play It Cool.” Does your impression of the song change after hearing the music? If so, how? (*Note* : Here it is recommended that the students read the lyrics before hearing the song with music.)
10. Pick one of the two poems and compare its definition of “cool” with that in the song. Give specific examples from the song (quotes) to prove your answer.

Following is the first stanza of “My Papa’s Waltz” by Theodore Roethke. As previously mentioned, one stanza of the poem will be examined in the Appreciation/Analysis section of each chapter.

My Papa’s Waltz
 The whiskey on your breath
 Could make a small boy dizzy;
 But I hung on like death.
 Such waltzing was not easy. ⁸

In this first stanza, the dancing forms of father and son blend together. The memory of the “dizziness” from the liquor fumes is accompanied by the mixture of joy and fear the child feels as he clings to his father. Here, the potency of the scene will be determined by these first few lines. Rhythm, rhyme, and figurative language all work with the original word choices in these beginning lines. The irony of the smoothness of the waltz that is not felt in the piece, is amplified by the other technical aspects of the poem.

Rhythm

Even when we do not recognize them, we are surrounded by rhythms; we cannot escape them; it may be said that the entire universe is founded on rhythm. Every planet has its own regular rhythm ... the seasons proceed in firm precision ... Night and day, light and darkness, sun and moon, succeed each other at regular intervals. All is recurrence and return; we are swung to the beat of an infinite pendulum. ⁹

Everything we do, our breathing, our pulse, the blinking of our eyes, even waking and going to work, establishes an organic rhythm. We grew up on the soothing rhythms of lullabies and the familiar beats of nursery rhymes. Jump-rope had songs to accompany the game; playing with jacks involved regular timed phrases to match up with bouncing beats. Still later, school cheers at sports events and rallies stressed heavy beats to be echoed by spectators in the stands.

Poetry continues the tradition. Perhaps the most unifying element in all verse is the idea of rhythm. Movement—be it rapid or dragged out, staccato or smooth—is always found in the lines.

The repetition of syllables is a delight that is enlarged by rhyme and alliteration. In music, ballads were easily remembered because of the repetition of whole lines of the song. These repetitions were called refrains or burdens.

Many refrains acted as a “chorus” in which the listeners joined. Certainly spirituals accomplish this aim. Folk songs, old and new, frequently use this technique to capture a particular mood. In each stanza of “Billy Boy,” the repetition is marked:

Did she ask you to come in, Billy boy, Billy boy,
Did she ask you to come in, Charming Billy?
She did ask me to come in, with a dimple on her chin,
She’s a young thing and cannot leave her mother.

Rhythms that move at a rapid pace tend to excite the reader while those that move at a slower pace tend to leave us saddened. John Milton’s lines, “Haste thee, Nymph, and bring with thee/ Jest and youthful jollity” really fly happily along. In contrast, his “Oft, on a plat of rise ground/ I hear the far-off curfew sound/ Over some wide-watered shore” ¹¹ cannot be read quickly if we are thinking in time with the slower pace of the rhythm.

Exercise 1: The Beat Goes On

Directions Play different types of music for your students. Ask them to clap along in time, with stress on stronger beats. Then select one or two poems that have a definite beat (iambic pentameter works well) and have the group clap up a storm together!

Homework Students are to pick out two songs they really like, one up beat, one slow. They should then write two things:

1. List words and word combinations which establish the mood.
2. Write three imaginative phrases for each song which convey the feeling the song gives.

A loose definition, therefore, would identify rhythm as the recurrence of certain sounds. When it is fixed into definite forms, it is meter. To simplify matters for students, meter can be divided into the four most popular “feet.” A foot is a group of two or three syllables. Those with two syllables are disyllabic feet, and those with three, trisyllabic. A brief review of the four English feet with examples of each follows. The teacher may wish to use this summary as a worksheet, combined with any of the exercises in this section.

The Forms of Poetry

The four English feet most commonly used in verse are:

The Iambic Foot consists of an unstressed syllable followed by a strongly accented one. It is a “skipping” foot: ta-DUM, ta-DUM, ta-DUM. It is seen in print as [ù «]. The following words are iambic: hello, afloat, delay, begin, oppose, believe, dispute, collect, delight, and because.

The Trochaic Foot is the exact opposite of the iambic. It consists of a strongly stressed syllable followed by an unaccented one. It is a marching foot: DUM-ta, DUM-ta, DUM-ta [« ù]. Such words in trochaic feet are: Tuesday, mother, answer, tender, softly, faster, and rising.

The Dactylic Foot consists of three syllables, a strongly-stressed syllable followed by two unaccented ones [« ù ù]. It is a “waltzing” rhythm. Dactylic words are: silently, tenderness, hickory, Saturday, fugitive, beautiful, and merriment. DUM-ta-ta, DUM-ta-ta, DUM-ta-ta.

The Anapestic Foot is the exact opposite of the dactylic. It consists of two unaccented syllables followed by a strongly-stressed syllable. It is a rapid movement: ta-ta-DUM, ta-ta-DUM, ta-ta-DUM [ù ù «]. Such words are: cavalier, intervene, serenade, picturesque, prepossess, and contradict.

Exercise 2: Featuring Feet 1

Directions Make a list of words using each type of foot. Then write two lines for each form.

Exercise 3: Featuring Feet II

Directions Read the two anonymous poems which follow. One of them has a jolly trochaic swing mixed with a little anapestic foot; the other has a strong iambic beat. Which one is which? Be prepared to read each poem aloud, stressing the correct beat.

Fifteen men on a dead man's chest—
Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!
Drink and the devil had done for the rest—
Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!

**

Warm summer sun, shine friendly here;
Warm western wind, blow kindly here;
Green sod above, rest light, rest light—
Good night, dear heart; good night, good night.

When the stress falls on the last syllable of a foot, it is a *rising* one, as in Budge's "And off, with a whirl of wings." When the stress falls on the first syllable of a foot, it is a *falling* one, as in Bronte's "Heavy and dark the night is closing." ¹²

No discussion of rhythm would be complete—or realistic—without the inclusion of "The Highwayman" by Alfred Noyes. Every student should read it, hear it, learn it, love it! Although it moves away from the theme of the city, the significance is that it *moves*. The highwayman's riding rhythm could be taking place anywhere and everywhere. These excerpts easily prove the point:

'And the highwayman came riding—
Riding—Riding—
The highwayman came riding, up to the old inn door ...
Then look for me by moonlight,
Watch for me by moonlight
I'll come to thee by moonlight, tho' hell shall bar the way. ¹³

There is a relentlessness about his ride that convinces the reader that indeed, even hell could not stop this particular rider. The echoes, forming refrains that repeat rhythmically in each stanza, keep up the galloping pace of the horseman. The repetitions of specific words are like the continued hoofbeats in the fateful journey. A good reading of this poem cannot help but stir the imaginations of students.

Exercise 4: Hearing “The Highwayman”

Directions Read the entire poem, “The Highwayman” by Alfred Noyes. Select *one* stanza and practice reading it aloud. Be sure your reading echoes the rhythm. Be prepared to read (or preferably recite) it in class and discuss how you chose your “pace.”

Exercise 5: Underground Undulation

Note : The Teacher should play “A Poem on the Underground Wall” from the *Par s ley , Sage, Rosemary, and Thyme* album by Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel. Ask the students to close their eyes and just feel the rhythm. Can they believe the story (from lyrics on a ditto) could really happen? Why is the tempo so rapid? How are the actions of the man linked to the actions of the train? What feeling is generated here?

Directions Listen to the song. Then look at the lyrics.

1. Why is it called “A Poem”?
2. What phrases are the most interesting? What do they make you think about?
3. Which word combinations and sounds best reflect (and create) the rhythm of the piece? How does the author’s choice of specific words contribute to the rhythm?

Discovering rhythm can be a lot of fun. Go back, for example, to the “cool” poems in the “Word Choice” chapter. Have the students investigate the movement of the three pieces. Certainly the snapping and refrainlike echoes in Sondheim’s “Play It Cool” generate the angry tension and high energy level of the characters. It might be interesting at this point to ask your student what it is about the rhythms of “Disco” that makes the music so popular today. Students should see that the intense, driving, relentless beat says something about the anxieties and economic strivings of the late seventies.

Any number of games, songs, or jingles present your students with the fact that rhythm is an intrinsic part of their environment. Once they understand this fact, young people will find the study of poetry and poetic forms less foreign and more inviting. The structures and patterns no longer seem like alien “school stuff.” A combination, especially in this section, of poetry and lyrics really can facilitate the students’ acceptance of studying poetry and other types of writing.

Appreciation/Analysis

The first poem suggested for use here is almost concrete in form. Concrete poetry looks a great deal like or suggests by shape its subject matter. If compared with “A Poem on the Underground Wall,” students will see two fine examples of the way word choices or combinations make us *feel* rhythm, in this case the rhythm of trains. The poem, “Crossing” by Phillip Booth, should be accompanied by these questions.

Questions:

1. What do you think the author's purpose for writing this poem was?
2. Identify ten phrases which contribute to the rhythm. How do these phrases remind you of a train?
3. Explain what you think "a fast-freight dream" means within the context of the poem.
4. Compare the rhythm here with that in "A Poem on the Underground Wall." Pick specific words the authors choose in each poem which contribute to the rhythm.
Explain the theme of "A Poem on the Underground Wall." How do you think the man in the
5. song feels? If you have ever written graffiti, try to explain how you felt when you did it, and why you did it. If you can, write a cinquain explaining the experience.

In order to further emphasize the fact that rhythm augments theme, the disco tune "Bad Girls" from Donna Summer's album of the same title is suggested. Contrast this with the mournful rhythm of Gil Scott Heron's "Pieces of A Man" (see Chapter 5, "Figurative Writing") or the classic Langston Hughes jazz poem, "Weary Blues," questions for which follow the questions for "Bad Girls."

Questions for "Bad Girls":

1. Why do you think the girls are called "bad" and "sad"? Try to find two other phrases in the song that make you feel the girls are sad.
2. Now that you've read the lyrics, listen to the complete song. Write five strong describing words (adjectives) to explain how the beat makes you feel.
3. What do you think the theme (main idea) of the song is? How does the rhythm (including all background sounds) help us to understand that theme?

Questions for "Weary Blues";

- Langston Hughes (1902-1967) was probably the first poet to try to capture the rhythms of
1. black music, especially jazz and blues, in poetry. Tell how the rhythm of this poem makes you feel. Should it be read slowly or quickly?
 2. Pick out specific words which help create the rhythm and mood.
 3. How is the rhythm in this poem different from that in "The Crossing"? "Bad Girls"? "A Poem on the Underground Wall"? "The Highwayman"?
 4. Can you identify any of the four rhyme schemes in the poem? Give examples.

Note An excellent reading of "The Weary Blues" can be found on the filmstrip "The Harlem Renaissance and Beyond," Part I.

The second stanza of “My Papa’s Waltz” will further illustrate the importance of rhythm.

We romped until the pans
Slid from the kitchen shelf;
My mother’s countenance
Could not unfrown itself.

In the four lines above, we see the continuation of Roethke’s image. Here, the activity of the dance is sustained with the word “romped,” and the clause, “until the pans slid from ... ” Everything is in motion—except the frozen frown of the mother. The face, personified, has chosen to remain fixed. In contrast, the beat reflects both the title and complexity of the memory. Reading this part of the poem aloud reveals a very regular, “beatable” rhythm. This differs from the first verse, where the second and fourth lines carry the predominantly iambic beat to an anapestic conclusion. These longer lines are echoed again in the third stanza. The broken beat defies the discipline and grace of a real waltz. The staggered rhythm erases the possibility of the real dance, while the regularity of the second stanza supports the dancelike mood of the piece. Here, the “romping” is defined by the steady movement of the lines.

Rhyme

City: San Francisco
In the morning the city
Spreads its wings
Making a song
In stone that sings.
In the evening the city
Goes to bed
Hanging lights
About its head.

Langston Hughes ¹⁴

The Toaster

A Silver-scaled Dragon with jaws flaming red
Sits at my elbow and toasts my bread.

I hand him fat slices, and then one by one

He hands them back when he sees they’re done.

William Jay Smith ¹⁵

Rhyme is probably the one device most associated with poetry by young people. It is an enjoyable and easily recognized part of the poetic experience, yet students must be cautioned that it is only ONE element of poetry, and not a prerequisite of the genre. As the two examples above clearly demonstrate, rhyme is certainly not used alone! In both poems, word choice, rhythm, and figurative language all join forces with rhyme to portray the image. The city is personified, having “wings” and a “head,” as is the toaster with “jaws.” The choice of those particular phrases make the images unique. The regular rhythm, mostly iambic, of “The Toaster” sets us up for the clever end rhyme.

Rhyming is as much a part of our growing up experiences as is rhythm. We find rhymes not only in Mother Goose, but in childhood games such as this irreverent ball-bouncing game:

Judge, judge, tell the judge
Mama has a baby!
It’s a boy full of joy,
Papa’s going crazy!
Wrap it up in tissue paper,
Tell the judge we’ll see him later.

Other common uses of rhymes include greeting cards and singing telegrams, which might feature lines like “Candles in the cake/ Are a nice way to celebrate.”

Before attempting a definition of rhyme, we must carefully examine what rhymes and what doesn’t. A perfect rhyme features words which have similar vowel sounds and consonant *endings* , but different consonant sounds *preceding* the vowel. For, war, thor nor, and abhor are perfect rhymes.

For, sport, morn, cork, and lord are not. Also, identical sounds technically cannot be considered perfect rhymes; for, fore, four, and metaphor are not perfect rhymes.

False or imperfect rhymes are common in the work of young writers and popular song writers. Combinations such as moon/bloom, smile/child, shame/pain, mind/time, and together/forever are time-worn examples of imperfect rhyme found in many of our favorite tunes. Perfect rhyme is more consistently discovered in classical poetry.

The teacher should certainly take note of and explain the differences between perfect and false rhyme. However, the teacher must be extremely careful not to discourage students’ first efforts on this account.

Both internal rhyme (words in the same line rhyming) and end rhyme (words at the end of lines rhyming) are always partly anticipated, yet partly unexpected. Hearing such words causes the satisfaction of recognition as well as the pleasure of surprise. Imagine the bored and disappointed reactions received if “Old King Cole/ Was a merry old man”?

Rhyme, in both poetry and lyrics, is often coupled with repetition—the rhyming lines being repeated for emphasis (i.e. “bad girls, sad girls”). The blend of rhyme and repetition is central to the enjoyment of shaping and selecting words. Serious poems, as well as nursery rhymes, are animated by echoes of repeated refrains:

Strolling on the green grass,
 green grass,
 green grass,
 Strolling on the green grass,
 A husky, dusky day.

There are two main divisions of rhyme: masculine and feminine. The masculine rhyme relies on single syllables: play, slay, weigh. The feminine rhyme encompasses all words or word combinations of two or more rhyming syllables: gay fellow, quite yellow, so mellow. Note, too, that although the rhyme could read gay fellow, hey! fellow, play-fellow, it would still be acceptable as perfect rhyme as long as the beginnings and endings rhyme.

Masculine rhyme is usually associated with strong rhymes. In Gerald Gould’s poem, “Fallen Cities,” the rhythmic repetition of the first rhyme in the last line of each verse, does add emphasis to the content:

I gathered with a careless hand
 A little heap of golden sand;
 And, as I saw it, in my sight
 Awoke a vision brief and bright.
 A city in a pleasant land. ¹⁶

Feminine rhyme, on the other hand, is less choppy and therefore adds fluency. Feminine rhyme can often break the monotony of the harsher masculine form. The combination, therefore, leads to a more musical flow. The following selection demonstrates a combination which creates a wonderful effect. The two stanzas are from Louis Goldberg’s “City Under Snow”:

Under dazzling wonder bowed,
 The city, anchored in a cloud,

Is heaped with white and glittering glory
From some immemorial story ...

**

On a star immaculate,
Where beauty's burden is too great;
Where beauty's burden is unbroken
With the dazzling touch of token ...

**

Let no single word be spoken. 17

The rhyme scheme here is noteworthy. The entire poem uses couplets (aa bb cc), or pairs of rhyming lines, except for the final three-line feminine echo: unbroken-token-spoken. The words chosen seem to add a hush by the mere repetition of the longer sounds. Familiar rhyme schemes include couplets and the abab alternation. An aabba scheme adds even more continuity, as seen in "Fallen Cities." Rhyme patterns are a real challenge, especially for those students who are more artisan than artist.

Exercise 1: Rhyme Time

Directions Find as many perfect rhymes as possible for the following words:

Metal Weary Wage Discover Sounded

Frighten Weather Sorrow Sing City

Exercise 2: Move Into The Groove

Directions Here are several sets of rhymed words. Write out couplets that end in each pair.

1. move/groove
2. gas/class
3. batter/clatter
4. beat/street
5. sin/grin

Exercise 3: Hitting The Road—On Your Own!

Directions The next step is to make up couplets on one specific idea. This time, only one word of the rhymed pair is given. You must come up with the second one yourself.

1. litter
2. journey
3. tread
4. time
5. feature

Exercise 4: Name Game

Directions A Clerihew is a short, humorous poem about a famous person with a funny name. The second line must rhyme with the name, for example:

William Makepeace Thackery
Was often accused of quackery.
He wrote *Vanity Fair*
While inside of a bear.

Try writing clerihews with these names:

1. Kareem Abdul-Jabar
2. James Earl Carter
3. Reggie Jackson
4. Howard Cosell
5. Your own name or a friend's

Exercise 5: Easy ABAB

Directions Instead of rhyming every two lines, you can rhyme every other line. This poem by Claude McKay is an example:

Harlem Dancer

Applauding youths danced with young prostitutes
And watched her perfect, half-clothed body sway;
Her voice was like the sound of blended flutes
Blown by black players on a picnic day.
She sang and danced on gracefully and calm,
The light gauze hanging loose about her form;
To me she seemed a proudly swaying palm
Grown lovelier for passing through a storm.
Upon her swarthy neck black shiny curls
Luxuriant fell; and tossing coins in praise,
The wine-flushed, bold-eyed boys, and even the girls,
Devoured her shape with eager, passionate gaze;
But looking at her falsely smiling face,
I knew her self was not in that strange place. ¹⁸

Try writing a poem with a rhyme scheme like this one.

Exercise 6: Assonance

Directions Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds. Notice the “i” sounds in this poem (remember it’s the sound, not the spelling that counts):

T y ger, t y ger, burning br i ght
I n the forests of the n i ght ...

For each of the following, write a phrase or pair of words that use assonance:

1. winter
2. taxi
3. computer
4. rain
5. dance

Note See “Figurative Language” for further information on assonance.

Appreciation/Analysis

Two songs and one poem, in addition to the others already cited in this chapter, are offered for examination in terms of their use of rhyme, and their themes; Billie Holiday’s “God Bless the Child,” Stevie Wonder’s “Living for the City,” and Charles Malam’s “Steam Shovel.” The questions below also review not only the four poems previously mentioned in this chapter, but also the songs and poems referred to in “Word Choice” and “Rhythm.” In this way students should begin to have an understanding of the interrelatedness of poetic devices. Also, by continually comparing the thematic elements of these works, students will learn to see vital connections not only in literature, but in life.

Questions

1. Tell the theme of the two songs in your own words. Find two quotes in each to prove what you say.
2. In this section, the contrast is most obvious between perfect and false rhyme. Find five examples of perfect rhyme and five of imperfect rhyme.
3. Tell the rhyme scheme in “Steam Shovel” and “Living for the City.”
4. What verbs in each piece really help sustain its meaning?
5. Pick one of the two songs in this chapter and compare it to one of the three selections in the last chapter in terms of *rhythm*.
6. Discuss the types of rhyme found in “Bad Girls” (feminine/masculine, internal/end, AB/AA).
7. How are the main figures in “Weary Blues” and “God Bless the Child” similar? How are they different? Use quotes to prove your point.
What image of the city do you see in Goldberg’s “City Under Snow”? Pick out specific words
8. which create this picture. How is the view of the city different in Wonder’s “Living for the City”? Pick out specific words to support your ideas.

9. In what ways are the “bad girls” like the “harlem dancer?” Use at least one quote from each.
10. Explain what things are compared in “City: San Francisco,” “Steam Shovel,” and “The Toaster.” Does the rhythm support the choice of image?

The hand that held my wrist
Was battered on one knuckle;
At every step you missed
My right ear scraped a buckle.

The alternating abab rhyme scheme is demonstrated in the third stanza of Roethke’s “My Papa’s Waltz.” The rhyme in this verse is perfect. Here, however, a two-syllable feminine rhyme is used to create the same broken effect as that of the concluding imperfect rhyme in the first stanza. “Dizzy” and “easy” purposely do not match; nor do the “missed” steps of the dancer. “Knuckle” and “buckle” have a similarly jarring effect. They add to the contrast between the illusions of the father and the sad reality that is understood by the frowning mother in the second verse.

Figurative Writing

Comparison, Exaggeration, and Sound Effects

Most of us do use images in everyday life. Someone who gets away with something is a “sly devil” or an “old dog.” An unattractive person is also a “dog” or a “beast.” A successful business person is a “lion of industry.” An excellent performer is a “star;” clothes are “threads;” and a bumbler is a “turkey.” All of these commonplace expressions are certainly imagistic! Our young poets may be unsophisticated in their treatment of one another at times, but their language patterns show a great deal about their ability to communicate with a fair amount of style and sophistication. The favorite form of creating images is the use of comparison. In life, as in poetry, metaphor overwhelms our choice of words. Therefore, a more careful look at the technique of comparative forms is warranted. Students can really enjoy this section of the unit. They can experiment with new ways of expressing their ideas and it is an exciting launching point for them. Suddenly, a skill they never realized they had becomes an invaluable asset in the classroom.

With younger children, Kenneth Koch has observed, “Comparisons are something children enjoy, and they are a natural and important part of poetry. Children are very good at them once they feel they are free to say whatever comes into their minds.”²⁰ Because they are still immersed in a world of possibility, comparisons come with greater facility than they do for adults. The whiteness of chalk dust can be cloud-like. Raindrops can be the sorrow of the skies. Therefore, the metaphor, its relative, the simile, and its enlarged form, the extended metaphor, become natural and necessary devices. Alliteration, personification, and onomatopoeia add the dimensions of sound and variation to the types of choices your students make. For more advanced

students, the terms synecdoche and metonymy, which are associative rather than figurative, can be added. (See glossary,)

Experimenting with familiar objects is an excellent way to begin. Prose poems, short descriptions of a limited subject, can be very useful. Students can be sent out on a scouting expedition, looking for trees that remind them each of himself or herself. A tall young man returned to his ninth grade English class one day with the following idea: “I feel like a great oak tree watching all the little saplings finally grow up around me.” Could any teacher have learned so much so quickly about childhood and acceptance?

Exercise 1: Explorations

Note This exercise is great for the fall when the variety of trees presents alternatives: those covered with multicolored foliage; those barren; those still green; those archetypically autumnal. You may want to plan a fifteen-or twenty-minute outing where you point out lots of different types to encourage students.

Directions

- Wander around school or your neighborhood and find a tree that really makes you stop and
1. look. For all the differences, is there one thing about this tree that makes you think about yourself or your feelings? Tell why.

Example I am like the branches of the willow tree that sway and sweep and sigh, but never stop when wind of rain or heavy snow try to push me over. I move with these great forces—not against them—and I survive.

- Draw (even if it’s awful!) a sketch of your tree as you see it. Do it right on the spot. Include it
2. with your description, which may be rewritten in any form you want, including the shape of your tree.

Note You may wish to review the concept of concrete poetry discussed in the “Rhyme” chapter.

Example

(figure available in print form)

The exercise above offers a wide spectrum of poetry skills. Obviously, the words “like” and “as” pop up, prompting a discussion of simile and its powers of direct comparison. The student that was “the great oak” was first, metaphorical, implying a specific relationship, and then able (though unaware of it) to extend his metaphor to encompass not only his fellow students, but their comparisons as well. Alliteration becomes an associative skill where the repeated sounds generate feelings in students. The addition of a “swish” to the free description would broaden the sophistication to include onomatopoeia, a technique with which students are most certainly familiar because of its constant use in common speech and lyrics. Reexamine this line from Sondheim’s “Play It Cool”: “Breeze it, buzz it, easy does it.”

The juxtaposition of the tree and the student also accomplishes, in reverse, the introduction of personification. Here, students can begin to relate their everyday use of the figurative skill (“the car Crawls along,” “the wind

whistles," "a house cries out for repair") to their own imaginative creations. Combining metaphor and personification can lead to some very interesting pieces of poetry. Introducing lines like "Night creeps over the city ... Night slowly creeps away" from Richard Durham's "Dawn Patrol" ²¹ presents the student with alternative reactions and opportunities to express the *living* nature of the city. The following passage from Norman McLeod's "Red Furnace" turns to metaphor and simile to create exciting, startling forms to humanize New York City.

The lateral trellis of Brooklyn Bridge
Arches its back like an infuriated cat,
And we are close to being thrown
Into the aerial outskirts of a skyHobnailed with stars on the heel of heaven. ²²

If the literal language presents the visual in a factual, photographic sense, the figurative makes no attempt to see or report, but rather filters experience to include speculation, anticipation, variation. The normal controls of what we see are abandoned; they are transformed by wish into what we desire to "see." Students need help making the leap; once over, however, the flow of ideas becomes a flood. Be prepared.

Below is a series of exercises that utilize various types of short poetry emphasizing aspects of city life. Basically, they are designed to give your students familiarity with and facility in the use of figurative language.

Exercise 2: THIS OBJECT HAS FEELINGS TOO!

Note : This exercise works on metaphor in a specific structure. Students must count out syllables according to set requirements, as they have in other exercises using cinquain.

Directions Choose three objects of one or two syllables each. (Example: "the chair" or "lampshade") and give each an unusual characteristic. In other words, using the structure of the cinquain, make three ordinary objects into extraordinary poems!

Example

Lampshade
Torn and Tattered
Dull and greasy-grimy
Light rays throw off dingy shadows
Lampshade

Question What kind of room, what kind of lifestyle, is this lampshade part of?

Example

Dryer
Tumbling twisting
Crying out when sneakers
Flying kick against moving walls.
Dryer

Question What human traits are given to the dryer? To the sneakers? How does it change your feeling about this particular clothes dryer?

The use of short poems or parts of longer poems can be excellent illustrations of the various aspects of figurative language.

Exercise 3: Compared to What?

Apartment House
A filing-cabinet of human lives
Where people swarm like bees in tunneled hives,
Each to his own cell in the towered comb,
Identical and cramped—we call it home.
Gerald Rafferty ²³

Questions

1. What three things does the apartment house become?
2. What is the simile in the poem?
3. How is the simile changed into an extended metaphor?

Langston Hughes' "Mother to Son" adds the taste of narrative poetry to the unit. Although emphasis is clearly placed on lyric poetry here, narrative forms certainly offer personal "stories" in verse forms:

Life for me ain't been no crystal stair,
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor—
Bare. ²⁴

This excerpt clearly utilizes extended metaphor. There are positive and negative connotations attached to gleaming fragile crystal. Central to the mother's feelings, however, is the idea of a run-down dangerous staircase. So much can be discussed based on these few lines. Insist that your students roll the words around in their ears for awhile. Why are words like "tacks," "splinters," and "torn up" all in the same group of lines? What is the power behind the repetition?

Moving to another author's use of similar imagery poses different questions: Safe upon the solid rocks the ugly houses stand.

Come and see my shining palace built upon the sand.

Edna St. Vincen ²⁵

Here, the poet has opted for the shining palace—but not without sacrifice. Students can compare the safety of ugly houses to the danger of the shifting sands upon which the "crystal" home rests. Would the mother in "Mother to Son" still opt for the crystal stair? Is Ms. Millay presenting the same situations and problems just because the pictures seem so similar? Quite simply, no. Students must begin to understand the shades of difference and the variations in meaning that figurative language permits.

Exercise 4: Metaphor or Simile?

Directions

- A. Identify what type of figurative language is being used.
 1. He was about to topple from the peak of his success.
 2. His laughter was like a breath of fresh air.

3. Justice is blind.
 4. Life is a stalking predator.
 5. The city is an infested jungle.
 6. The teeth of a skyscraper bite at the clouds.
 7. The windows were like empty eyes.
 8. The crane arm cut through the midday sun.
 9. Like a dagger, the light pierced my eye.
 10. Rosy-fingered dawn crept across the midnight sky.
- B. Briefly, and in your own words, explain the picture you get after reading each of the ten sentences above.
- C. Choose five of the ten statements in A, and write the metaphor as simile, or vice versa.

Exercise 5: Figuratively Speaking

Directions Take the literal statement and turn it into a metaphor or simile. Be sure to use both devices in your work.

1. The light ray fell on the garbage.
2. Litter rolled in the wind.
3. The snow was reflected in the big window.
4. Empty streets in early spring.
5. Summer nights downtown.

Exercise 6: This Sounds How?

Directions

- A. Make a list of the sounds associated with two of the items listed below.
- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. school cafeteria | 6. noisy factory |
| 2. train crash | 7. big truck at night |
| 3. rock concert | 8. a car accident |
| 4. crowded store | 9. rain on a window |
| 5. construction site | 10. cleaning the kitchen |
- B. Select two more items. Make a list of sounds that *repeat* letters in every word.

Exercise 7: Finding Onomatopoeic Words

Directions All the words below refer to sounds. Circle those that represent onomatopoeia—words that *imitate* the sounds they define.

- | | | |
|------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 1. speak | 21. gobble | 41. clackety |
| 2. hoot | 22. snort | 42. blare |
| 3. whisper | 23. swallow | 43. growl |
| 4. cluck | 24. gulp | 44. bawl |
| 5. cackle | 25. wail | 45. hum |
| 6. crash | 26. moan | 46. buzz |
| 7. wham | 27. grunt | 47. caw-caw |
| 8. thud | 28. tick-tock | 48. chirp |
| 9. whush | 29. chime | 49. cacophonous |
| 10. swish | 30. sound | 50. harmony |
| 11. splash | 31. shriek | 51. twang |
| 12. hit | 32. whinny | 52. drawl |
| 13. bleat | 33. toot | 53. accent |
| 14. roar | 34. scream | 54. slur |
| 15. bellow | 35. hiss | 55. squeak |
| 16. call | 36. boo | 56. smash |
| 17. creak | 37. squawk | 57. yell |
| 18. sing | 38. yelp | 58. stomp |
| 19. holler | 39. bark | 59. exclaim |
| 20. lisp | 40. bow-wow | 60. whisper |

Exercise 8: How To Make Noise

Directions Noisy words include sounds like crash and bump. Quiet words, on the other hand, like murmur and silence, all lead you to a still, restful feeling. Find as many words that, just by the sound, make you feel noisy or quiet.

Finally, alliteration (the repetition of sounds in phrases), assonance (repetition of vowel sounds—see Exercise 6, “Thyme”), and onomatopoeia (use of words that sound like their meaning) are devices that can fascinate students. Insist that some of their lines, even if they *mean* little on the surface, sound wonderful. Exercises 6, 7, and 8 above reinforce sound skills.

Examples of these devices are everywhere: words, songs, prose, and poetry. Certainly a few well-chosen examples can demonstrate the technique. Two classic examples of the power of carefully planned alliteration are found in Tennyson and Coleridge:

The moan of doves in immemorial elms
And murmur of innumerable bees. ²⁶

Here, Tennyson's "m" and "l" sounds almost create the low buzz of the bees, and the cooing of the doves. Coleridge's famous "In Xanadu did Kubla Khan" matches the vowel sets in each half line, while the matched consonants reinforce the musical feeling.

Tongue twisters ("Sally sells seashells by the seashore") can show the enjoyable side of alliteration. Lyrics from *The Mikado* (W.S. Gilbert) also point out the ridiculous extremes in alliteration;

To sit in solemn silence in a dull, dark dock,
In a pestilential prison, with a life-long lock,
Awaiting the sensation of a short, sharp shock,
From a cheap and chippy chopper on a big, black block! ²⁷

Onomatopoeia creates a real feeling of movement in poetry. In Noyes' "The Highwayman," a great deal of the strength of the rhythm depends on the activity of the rider. The line "Over the cobbles he clattered and clashed ..." certainly gets the reader going.

In Poe's "The Bells" every variety of bell makes a distinct noise: "tinkling" sleigh bells, "tolling" and "moaning" funeral bells. Finally, the magic of the word "tintinnabulation" really does recreate the delicate sound of light silver bells as they jingle with the movement of a sleigh. ²⁸

Students should become familiar with such examples and then begin to imitate sound patterns in their own work. The sound of a word, therefore, sustains an image as much as the meaning of a word. Poetry, because of its versatility, enables students to grasp at glimmers rather than entire chunks of understanding. Encourage them. Active imaginations that lead to new sound, word, idea combinations also produce more careful thinkers. Above all, students get to explore untapped visions within themselves—a learning experience for us all.

Appreciation/Analysis

Because this final chapter is so important, and so full of many interesting poetic devices, the appreciation/analysis section will be divided by skills. This does not, of course, mean that any one poem or song displays ONLY that device, but rather provides an excellent use of one technique successfully blended with many others. Here, more than in any previous chapter, the teacher is urged to review all works referred to in the unit in light of their use of figurative language—especially as it combines with previously discussed devices to create moving and meaningful images. Finally, the last stanza of "My Papa's Waltz" is analyzed, and like the unit itself, unites all the threads of poetry while displaying the motifs of city life.

Metaphor and Simile

The poem “Dawn Patrol” by Richard Durham is a beautiful example of metaphor and extended metaphor. In addition it presents a chilling image of the city at night. “Streets spangle,” “lights splatter,” and “soon comes the police patrol of dawn.” The poem also uses simile:

“A hobo bowed over a bar of time,.... Blinking like beer bubbles.”

Questions:

1. Find five examples of metaphor in “Dawn Patrol.”
2. How could one example be written as a simile? Is there a simile in the poem? If so, tell it.
3. What image of the city is portrayed here? Pick two selections from earlier in the unit, one contrasting Durham’s image, and one comparable. Explain similarities and differences.
4. Pick five verbs which contribute to the central image.
5. Is there a theme for this poem? State it.

“Strange Fruit” by Allan, and made famous by Billie Holiday, also demonstrates the use of metaphor in song. The haunting tune has as its central image the idea of a lynched man hanging from a tree like piece of overripe fruit. Ask students the same questions here as for “Dawn Patrol.”

Personification

Frank Marshall Davis’ “Tenement Room: Chicago” exhibits an artful use of personification. “The day creeps/slowly/from the tired room,” “a crippled table,” “two drooping chairs,” and “a cringing bed age-weary” are just a few of the powerful personified images.

Questions:

1. Find five examples of personification in the poem.
2. What is the mood of the poem? The theme?
3. How do we discover a great deal about an entire city through a look at just one room?
4. Look back through the other poems and songs in the unit. Find two examples of personification.
5. Why does the room “sleep dreamlessly”?

Onomatopoeia

Two pieces are useful here, one prose and one poetry. John Updike’s “Sonic Boom” is a poem which uses the expression “Thump of Doom” to help us visualize today’s “innovations” which produce uncomfortable side effects. The prose piece exhibits the way poetic techniques can enhance non-poetic literature. “The Sounds of the City” by James Tuite explores the sounds of New York through superb use of onomatopoeia.

Questions:

1. Find two examples of onomatopoeia in “Sonic Boom.” What is the theme of the poem?
2. Find at least ten phrases from “The Sounds of the City” which represent onomatopoeia. What image do you get of New York from this piece?
3. Looking back over other selections used in the unit, find three examples of onomatopoeia.
4. Write a paragraph about the sounds in your neighborhood using onomatopoeic words.

You beat time on my head
With a palm caked hard by dirt,
Then waltzed me off to bed
Still clinging to your shirt.

The imagery in the final stanza of “My Papa’s Waltz” works to tie together all the parts. Here, the symmetry of a poem is neatly revealed. Just as the father “beat time” on the son’s head, so, too, the rhythm continues for the reader. A hand does not stroke the child, a dirty palm drums on his head. There is no sense of real affection or wholeness. Throughout the poem, beginning with the notion of “breath” there is no full character description or development: there is an ear, a countenance, a knuckle, a head, a palm—all touching in time to the consistently irregular, deliberately clumsy beat. Throughout the blur of the dance, only glimpses of the man and boy are seen.

The image of the clinging, worried child is an echo of the picture created in the first stanza. Like the true motion of a waltz, the uneven rhythm of the poem has taken a circular pattern as a result of the figurative language. The child hangs in the first verse and is still clinging until he is lowered into bed. In between, the noisy pans, the frowning mother, the battered knuckle, the scraped ear, present a vivid active system of sensory responses that constitute the shape of the memory. However, the beating of the poem does not necessarily lead to a sad view of this father. In a thematic discussion of “My Papa’s Waltz,” one has to consider the ideas of a “dance of death” or a “dance of life” that, through the repeated action of “beating time” on his son’s head, allows the father his chance to outwit death if only for the moment. The power of the poem rests in the combination of the dance motion and the frenetic path described. Rhythm and imagery are used together to indicate the man’s strong desire to live in the face of death (clearly present in the choice of words: “hung on like death”) through this momentary sharing with his young son.

Another interesting discussion can be generated from the adjectives chosen to describe Papa’s character. Finally, consider these questions: 1. Is he like other fathers? Is he perhaps only a victim trying to get through one more day? 2. Will the child, at twenty, be able to deal with his own misfortune any better because of such a memory?

“My Papa’s Waltz” is a perfect example of a launching point for students. The ability to condense so many

possibilities into sixteen short lines fully demonstrates the successful result of interaction between the various technical skills required to write poetry.

The Final Leap: Thematic Investigation of Self-Alienation

This last section should begin with a repetition of “Apartment House” as thematic evidence that the city created a world where people are isolated and ultimately alienated. The following songs and poems will demand students’ careful attention to shades of meaning, as well as to the poets’ use of language. To demonstrate the basic format, material previously used in the unit will be supplemented with two new pieces. All four initial selections center around urban women’s self-images. Specific questions relating discussed techniques to this variation on the original theme are included. It is hoped that students will see parallels to their own urban experiences and find inspiration for their own creative efforts.

The first poem, Waring Cuney’s “No Images,” is an affecting portrayal of a girl’s self-analysis. After examining it, students should reread Claude McKay’s “Harlem Dancer” and compare the two. The second pairing—the popular song “Native New Yorker” and Edna St. Vincent Millay’s poem “Lament” provide further provocative connections.

Questions for “No Images”:

1. Contrast looking into a river with looking into dishwater. What happens to the image?
2. What is the writer’s attitude toward the girl he is describing? List specific words and phrases.
3. What are the girl’s opinions of herself? Give details.
4. Why did the poet name this piece “No Images”?

Extension Questions:

1. How is the girl’s image of herself in “Harlem Dancer” different from that of the girl in “No Images”? How is it similar?
2. What word defines the dancer’s image?
3. How is her world bounded (what kind of people create her environment)?
4. How does the end of the poem startle the reader? Does it become more or less like “No Images” because of these lines?

Extension Questions:

1. How is the dancing portrayed in the second verse of “Native New Yorker” similar to the picture in “Harlem Dancer”?
2. What does the line “love is just a passing word” suggest about the girl’s relationships?

3. What is the image of this “New York City girl”? What language supports your opinion?
4. What is the metaphor in the last stanza? To what is it comparing New York City life?

Extension Questions:

Note When students read Millay’s poem, stress the personal tone that a first person narrator produces (especially in relation to the other works here).

1. How is the mother showing her grief? Give examples.
2. What is the purpose of the refrain, “Life must go on”? What does the repeated line suggest about the woman’s surface composure?
3. What is this woman’s self-image? How is it like or unlike the other women’s opinions of themselves and their worlds?
4. How does the mother attempt to keep her husband alive? What is the real effect of her actions?
5. Look at the last lines again: “Life must go on;/I forget just why.” What is her final message to the reader? Why is this a song-like “Lament”?

Conclusion

Exercise 1 : Reread all four poems. Write a paragraph that expresses your feelings about these women in general.

Exercise 2 : Write your own poem about a woman that you think has a hard or lonely life. Use the cinquain or haiku form.

Other interesting works which can be easily analyzed in relation to the theme of alienation are:

“Too Blue” by Langston Hughes—This is a lovely sad poem which is undercut by the last stanza. It is in the first person, and as the narrator wonders if he should put a bullet to his head, he realizes, “But I ain’t got/Neither bullet nor gun—/And I’m too blue/ To look for one.”

“The Sound of Silence” by Paul Simon—This classic Simon and Garfunkel tune is beautifully written using personification, rhyme, and metaphor to pursue the idea of haunting loneliness within the noise of the city. Hence, the sound of silence.

“Pieces of a Man” by Gil Scott-Heron—This is the title song on the first album of a young black poet/lyricist/singer/musician. Using metaphor, the song is a beautiful narrative about a man going to “pieces” after losing a job. The song is from a son’s point of view.

“The Stranger” by Billy Joel—Like Scott-Heron, Billy Joel is a young lyricist/singer. The central image in this song “faces of a stranger,” emphasizes that we all live in shells. The song raises the question of why we all have faces that “we hide away forever.”

One final work of interest is, interestingly, a short story by Toni Cade Bambara entitled "Geraldine Moore, the Poet." The story typifies the breakthrough for a student who believes she cannot "get into" poetry from either the appreciation or creative end. Here, Geraldine watches her life in a ghetto crumble into ruin. She returns to class and, having absorbed her observations, spontaneously translates them into the rich language of poetry. The teacher weeps at the blackboard. The piece demonstrates the sensitivity every educator should strive for.

As should be evident, the only limits in a unit of this kind are each teacher's energy and imagination.

How To Eat A Poem

Don't be polite

Bite in.

Pick it up with your fingers and lick the juice that may run down your chin.

It is ready and ripe now, whenever you are.

You do not need a knife or fork or spoon

or plate or napkin or tablecloth

For there is no core

or stem

or rind

or pit

or seed

or skin

to throw away.

Eve Merriam ²⁹

Glossary

Twenty-three essential terms are defined below. Following that, a list of important terms appears in alphabetical order. Babette Deutsch's and Louis Untermeyer's handbooks can provide all the added information you might need.

Alliteration : The repetition of the same sound at close intervals in a group of words. The sound or sounds may appear at any part of the words. *Example* : I never ever need nirvana.

Abstract Poem ; This is verse that depends little on meaning, and mainly relies on aural effectiveness.

Accent : The intensity of emphasis on a syllable of a word; the stress.

Less emphasis is marked by a ù; stronger stress, with an increasingly bold «.

Assonance : The repetition of vowel sounds or similar sounds to produce the resemblance of rhyme: willow and fellow.

Ballad : In an overall sense the ballad is a narrative poem that has, at some point, been set to music; it is also a piece that uses a refrain, giving the effect of a song. Creates the combination of a narrative and a lyric poem.

Blank verse : Associated mainly with Shakespeare's plays, the term applies to any verse without end rhyme or stanzaic divisions.

Caesura : (also *Cesura*) A pause within the line or at the end of a line of verse. This break is used to accentuate the rhythm.

Couplet : (archaic—*distich*) Two lines of matching verse that succeed one another; they may match in length and/or rhyme.

Connotation : The implied meaning of a word or phrase.

Denotation : Direct or specific meaning of a word or phrase.

Foot : A measure of the number of syllables that make up part of a verse line; each syllable is the equivalent of a beat in a bar of music.

Form : The metrical and stanzaic structure of a poem.

Free verse : (French: *vers libre*) A form based upon a more open and, therefore, often-irregular movement, rather than a rigid pattern. The rhythm is implied rather than based on any fixed meter.

Heroic Line : iambic pentameter, or five iambic feet on one line of verse. *Internal rhyme*: (interior rhyme) The repetition of the same rhyme sound within the line or the structure of a poem. *Example* : What I'd give to remember/How I lived in September.

Meter : Meaning, literally, to measure, it designates the regular succession of beats in a deliberate pattern.

Metonymy : A figure of speech where two things are associated by making a part stand for the whole: lands belonging to the *Crown* .

Prose poem : Usually a short prose passage where the poetic quality is obvious, especially if the rhythm and/or the connotations of language create the sensations of poetry.

Refrain : (also burden) A chorus; a few lines or a phrase repeated at the end of different stanzas.

Scansion : A careful dissection of the metrical patterns of lines of verse, separating feet and noting stresses and pauses; The sky/ is filled/with joy.

Sonnet : The basic form of a 14-line poem that is divided into an eight line section (octave) and a six-line section (sestet). The *Petrarchan* sonnet has the most rigid form: the octave is always abbaabba, and the sestet abcabc or ababab. The Shakespearean sonnet is famous for its final rhymed couplet.

Synecdoche . A figurative term for the association of an object with one of its details: "From sea to shining sea" represents the entire trans-continental span.

Verse : It is often used as a line in a poem, especially where the structure is formed. Verse is also synonymous with stanza.

Other terms to explore:

Ballade
Cadence
Chant
Chorus
Cinquain
Conceit
Concrete poetry
Diamont
Epigram
Epitaph
Epic
Epistle
Epithet
Euphemism
Haiku
Idyll
Image
Limerick
Onomatopoeia
Pastoral
Poetic license
Strophe
Syncopation
Variable syllable

Notes

1. Stephen Dunning, Edward Lueders, and Hugh Smith, *Reflections on a Gift of Watermelon Pickle* (New York: Lothrop, Lee, and Shepard Co., 1966), p. 17.
2. Louis Untermeyer, *Doorways to Poetry* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1938), p. 54.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
5. *Ibid.*, pgs. 30–34. A more in-depth analysis of the major differences between poetry and prose can be found here.
6. Dunning, et. al., p. 18.
7. Untermeyer, p. 157.
8. Ruthe T. Sheffey and Eugenia Collier, eds., *Impressions in Asphalt* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 129.
9. Untermeyer, p. 69.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
"The Light Fantastic" from "L'Allegro" and "The Quiet-Hour" from "11Penseroso." Robert C.
11. Pooley, et. al., eds., *England in Literature* (Chicago: Scott, Foresman, and Co., 1963), pp., 211–214.
12. Babette Deutsch, *Poetry Handbook* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1962), pp., 129–130.
13. Untermeyer, pp. 75–80.
14. Arna Bontemps, *Golden Slippers* (New York: Harper and Row, 1941), p. 133.
15. Dalton H. McBee, *Writer's Journal: Explorations* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Janovich, Inc., 1972), p. 105.
16. Untermeyer, pp. 18–19.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
18. Barbara Dodds Stanford, *I, Too, Sing America* (Rochelle Park: Hayden Book Co., 1971), p. 104.
19. Robert C. Pooley, p. 339.
20. Kenneth Koch, *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), p. 105.
21. Bontemps, p. 134.
22. Untermeyer, pp. 121–122.
23. Dunning, et. al., p. 39.
24. Alan Lomax and Raoul Abdul, eds., *300 Years of Black Poetry* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1970), p. 225.
25. Edna St. Vincent Millay, *Collected Lyrics* (New York: Harper and Row, 1939), p. 127.
26. Untermeyer, p. 128.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 133.
29. Dunning, et al., p. 15.

Annotated Bibliography

Bontemps, Arna, ed. *Golden Slippers* . New York: Harper and Row, 1941.

A first-rate anthology of Afro-American poetry designed specifically for the young reader. The chapter on the city offers a wide view of urban life.

“Dawn Patrol”

“Tenement Room: Chicago”

“City: San Francisco”

Cahill, Susan and Michele F. Cooper. *The Urban Reader* . Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971.

A gold mine of prose, poetry, and pictures of various aspects of city life. Lyrics are also included. A must-see for teachers and students.

“I Went to the City”

“The Sounds of the City”

Deutsch, Babette. *Poetry Handbook : A Dictionary of Terms* . New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1962.

A good explanatory text for teachers. Great examples of all techniques presented in dictionary form.

Dunning, Stephen, Edward Lueders, and Hugh Smith. *Reflections on a Gift of Watermelon Pickle* . New York: Lothrop, Lee, and Shepard Co., 1966. This is a great source book. It includes a wide variety of poetic styles and subjects. The book is beautifully complemented by black and white photographs.

“How To Eat A Poem” “Crossing”

“Unfolding Bud” “Too Blue”

“Steam Shovel”

“Apartment House”

“Sonic Boom”

“Gone Forever”

Greene, Marvin L, ed. *Something Else* . Glenview: Scott, Forsman, and Co., 1970.

This is an interesting anthology particularly featuring Toni Cade Bambara’s “Geraldine Moore the Poet,” a short story which really captures *how* poetry grows out of common experience.

Jones, LeRoi (Imamu Baraka). *Blues People : Negro Music in White America* . New York: William Morrow and

Co., 1963.

Good background on blues and music of the city in several chapters (6,7,8). Stress here is on a continuum from African forms to black expression in an urban environment. A useful source of information.

Koch, Kenneth. *Wishes , Lies , and Dreams* . New York: Vintage Books, 1970. The classic text for teaching poetry to elementary school students. It's an inspiration for everyone!

Lee, Ulysses, Sterling A. Brown, and Arthur P. Davis, eds. *The Negro*

Caravan . New York: Arno Press, 1970.

A superb and thorough collection of Afro-American literature, especially poetry. Because it was originally published in 1941, it contains works not commonly anthologized.

“Weary Blues”

Lomax, Alan, and Raoul Abdul, eds. *300 Years of Black Poetry* . New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1970.

An excellent anthology, including many African poets, particularly those of the Negritude period.

“Mother to Son”

Lomax, John A., and Alan Lomax, eds. *American Ballads and Folk Songs* . New York: The MacMillan Co., 1934.

The introduction has background material on traditional ballads. The body includes hundreds of examples of lyrics separated by subject, including chapters on the blues, spirituals, and work songs.

McBee, Dalton H. *Writer’s Journal : Explorations*. New York: Harccurt, Brace, Janovich, Inc., 1972.

An interesting text covering many styles of writing.

Millay, Edna St. Vincent. *Collected Lyrics* . New York: Harper and Row, 1939.

Lots of imagery and sound patterns. Millay lived in New York, and wrote beautiful lyric poetry. She saw the more positive side of the city—but also felt alienation of the individual.

“Lament”

“Second Fig”

Pooley, Robert C., George K. Anderson, Paul Farmer, and Helen Thornton, eds. *England in Literature* . Chicago: Scott, Foresman, and Co., 1963. Basic text on English literature including historical overviews, biographical data, and numerous selections.

Rockwitz, Murray, and Milton Kaplan. *The World of Poetry* . New York;

Globe Book Co., 1965.

An excellent anthology that divides poetry into aspects of human existence. There are hundreds of selections here that reflect feeling and shared personal experiences. Chapters of special value are “Trains” and “The

City.”

“Chicago”

Shange, Ntozake. *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf* . New York: McMillan Publishing Co., 1977. Powerful choreopoem that became a stunning Broadway production. This contemporary piece shows every aspect of this unit; technique, theme dramatic presentation, and appeal. It is a fantastic way to introduce longer sustained poetry. It is especially useful if paired with the soundtrack. Some parts may need to be screened for younger students.

Sheffey, Ruthe T., and Eugenia Collier, eds. *Impressions in Asphalt* .

New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1969.

This anthology divides urban life into sections of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. Each one deals with a different aspect of personal experiences.

“No Images”

“My Papa’s Waltz”

Stanford, Barbara Dodds, ed. *I , Too , Sing America* . New York: Hayden Book Co., 1971.

The entire book is filled with excellent poetry and prose selections from the Afro-American experience, arranged chronologically.

“Harlem Dancer”

“We Real Cool”

“Motto”

Untermeyer, Louis. *Doorways to Poetry* . New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1938.

Although most exercises and selections are based on diverse subjects, many of the sections are divided into themes in one chapter, “The Mind of Poetry.” This is an excellent book that does a good job of integrating technical information with careful analysis.

“The Highwayman”

The Mikado excerpts

“Fallen Cities”

“City Under Snow”

“Billy Boy”

“I Meant To Do My Work Today”

_____. *The Forms of Poetry* . New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1926.

Another good solid dictionary of terms with examples.

Wheelock, John Hall. *What Is Poetry?* . New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963.

"In the making of a poem, the creative impulse and critical faculty must be equally matched." (p. 70)

Wheelock is himself a poet who works on themes of isolation. In this book, he considers people's resistance to poetry. He also investigates why modern and contemporary poetry is often baffling to the unsophisticated reader. A good book for teachers who are concerned with acceptance of a poetry unit.

Songs

"Bad Girls." Donna Summer, Eddie Hokenson, Bruce Sudano, and Joe "Bean" Esposito. Starrin Music Publishing Corp./Sweet Summer Night Music (BMI), 1979. *Bad Girls* , Casablanca Records and Filmworks, Inc.

"God Bless the Child." Billie Holiday and Arthur Herzog, Jr. *Billie Holiday's Greatest Hits* , Decca Records.

"Living for the City." Stevie Wonder. Stein and Van Stock Inc., and Black Bull Music Inc., 1973. Inner Visions, Tamala Records.

"Native New Yorker." Sandy Linzer and Denny Hendell. Featherbed Music Co. and Desiderata Music Co., 1977. *Odyssey* , RCA.

"Pieces of a Man." Gil Scott-Heron and Brian Jackson. Bob Thiele Music, Ltd. ASCAP. *Pieces of a Man* , Flying Dutchman Records.

"Play It Cool." Stephen Sondheim and Leonard Bernstein. United Artists. *West Side Story* , Columbia Records.

"A Poem on the Underground Wall." Paul Simon. BMI. *Parsley , Sage , Rosemary , and Thyme* , Columbia Records.

"The Sounds of Silence." Paul Simon. BMI. *The Sounds of Silence* , Columbia Records, 1965.

"Strange Fruit." Allan. Edward B. Marks Music Corporation, BMI. *The Best of Billie Holiday* , MGM Records, Inc., 1972.

"The Stranger." Billy Joel. Joel songs. *The Stranger* , CBS Inc. Columbia Records, 1977.

Note An album of the Broadway choreopoem *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When The Rainbow Is Enuf* is available and is an excellent way to augment use of the written version. The albums of the poet Nikki Giovanni which use gospel music for a background to poetry readings are also good supplements.

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