



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1985 Volume I: Poetry

Rapping and Rhyming—Poetry in Motion

Guide for Curriculum Unit 85.01.05
by Jan Johnson

This unit attempts to make the connection between old and new. Methods of poetic expression have changed over the years, but the messages have remained the same. We will explore a group of poems that deal with the death of two presidents in two different times—Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy. Also, we will study ballads and poems from the 1800s to the present, concerning interpersonal relationships. Following discussions will reveal how the students relate to these works. Could they have been written today? How would we say the same thing?

A creative writing section will introduce students to the writing process. Related activities along with a ballad study will lead into the writing of their own original ballads.

The study of popular “rap” songs will tie into a short study of oral traditions. A ballad will be chosen from the ballad study and will finally be transformed into a New Haven rap.

The culmination of this project for my own intent and purposes will be a performance. It will incorporate dramatic and dance interpretations of poetry we have studied, original pieces written by students, the chosen ballad, and the inspired rap. Seventh grade students from theatre and dance classes will be a part of this special evening performance.

Although inspired by the movement and dialogue impetus, this unit has strong academic thrust. I have developed it in a way that I feel could be used in many academic areas.

(Recommended for Dance and Theatre classes, grade 7)

Key Words

Poetry Writing Instruction

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