



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

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## Working with Poetry: An Actor's Approach

Curriculum Unit 85.01.06  
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I am not an English teacher, as are most of my companions in this volume. I am a high school drama teacher, who has worked with all ages of children as well as adults. My aim was to develop a unit using poetry to teach acting to high school students. Many students seem to take a dim view of writers of the past and of poetry of any sort. This is largely due to lack of familiarity, a lack of familiarity shared by many of us teaching or using poetry in our classes. Many of us think of poets as an elite group, who use difficult words and funny rhythms, arranging them in peculiar patterns to confuse us, to play a game on us.

While poetry can indeed be a kind of game, it is definitely a game that requires two players, the poet and the reader. There is a theatre game called, "What's The Object of the Game?" The class sits in a circle. The teacher invents the "object" (say, passing a book face up to any student wearing sneakers and passing it face down to students wearing other kinds of shoes.) The teacher passes the book to the student on her left, up or down depending on the student's shoes. The student passes the book to the student on his/her left saying, "I received this book up (down), and I pass this book to you up (down.)" If the book is passed correctly, fine! If the book is passed incorrectly the teacher corrects the student. The book continues to get passed until everyone has caught on to "the object" of the game. Confused? I'll explain further in *The Appendix* .

Studying poetry reminds me of this game. For while there are certain tools to help you study poetry, you do have to play the game to "get it." Meter, rhythm, metaphor and irony are some of the tools the poet uses and they can become signposts for the reader, to help him discover the poem, although "there is no real formula for reading or understanding poetry except complete attention." <sup>1</sup> "Focus your attention! . . . Concentrate!" I can hear myself saying it for the umpteenth time. Focused attention and concentration are the basic tools for acting.

We may understand a poem but not respond to it, just as we may understand a painting, song, or play and not respond to it. Often our lack of response is due to unfamiliarity with the form, language, or subject matter, but it can also just not "be our thing." A poem may appeal to me and not to you, although we both understand what it is about and appreciate the poet's skill. Poems, like everything, go in and out of style. Our own tastes and life experience will color our response to any art.

I read a good many poems in the course of this seminar. I would start off on the first page or sometimes any page of an anthology, sometimes skipping around, sometimes reading in order. I didn't read everything with great care, but it struck me how often some particular poem would grab my attention for unknown reasons

and pull me back to explore it further. Invariably it would be a poem I liked. It spoke to me personally, describing in some way, perhaps something that I knew, but couldn't articulate, or describing something in depth I'd seen, but only partially seen, or touching my feelings and emotions very intimately. How did the poet know? Your relationship to a poem can be very private and yet easy to share with others since it's published in a book, read by many others, over many years. There is a curious intimacy that can develop between poet and reader, leading you to wonder and to imagine and think about words and music and how to "say it right."

In the Appendix section of this unit, I have suggested some games and exercises that I use in teaching acting and that I will use in class with this unit on poetry. Many of these games mirror the process you go through in exploring a poem.

"What's the Object of the Game?" forces the player to discover the "meaning" of the game by trial, error and observation. All of the games require active participation and use of the senses, as well as concentration. These are the same tools necessary for exploring poetry. We should encourage students to examine poetry like a concentration game; looking for meaning by trial and error, using their senses and feelings as well as their minds. The sounds, images, smells, tastes and rhythms will reveal meanings, both intimate and universal. I hope students will find poetry exciting and pleasurable.

The poems I have selected for this unit are poems that I feel are essentially dramatic. By that I don't mean tragic or necessarily theatrical, but playable. Dramatic poetry has generally been thought of as a speaker or character speaking to a particular implied audience, as in *Fra Lippo Lippi*, by Robert Browning. I am using the term dramatic poetry in a much broader sense including narrative, dialogue, song, and internal monologue. Some of the poems are from past centuries so that students can get to know a period and style in a short piece before they have to take on a period play. Others are early 20th century or contemporary and some of the poets are also playwrights. I have selected several of these poems to discuss from an actor's point of view. A list of some of the modern and contemporary poems that I will draw upon is at the end of the unit. They have been chosen with the high school student in mind, as well as for their dramatic content.

From an actor's point of view, you are always a character. Thus, a poem is either written by a character talking about himself, or written by a playwright/poet, about a character or characters. After reading a script or a poem, the first question the actor should ask is, "What is it all about?" You may not fully know, so you now ask three questions that are key to an actor: "Where am I?" "Who am I?" "What do I want?"

The Where includes the following: What country? What season? Am I inside or out? What are my surroundings? All of these questions may not be clear from the text. Some may have to be inferred or felt or guessed at, but the more specific you can make your physical surroundings to yourself, the more help you will have in building the character.

The next series of questions involve The Who. "What do I look like?" "How old am I?" "What am I wearing?" "Am I afraid, worried, shy, angry, etc.?" If there is another person in the poem or another person implied "What is my relationship to them?"

"What do I want?" is another way of saying "the actor's objective." We always want something, even if it's to be alone. We are always doing something. When a mother calls out to her daughter, "What are you doing?", and the daughter replies, "Nothing!", she is lying. The daughter may not be doing what she should be doing, but she is doing something. She may be thinking about a sweater she saw and wants, or how stupid she was in school, but something is going on. When a poet sits down to write a poem, he wants to express something. Once you have decided what the character in the poem wants and what they are doing, you must go further.

How is the character showing us what they want? What are the details? This should get you into imagery, metaphor, conceits, metrics and other aspects of poetic language. At this point you are ready to ask again, “What is this poem about?”

This approach to building a character is essentially derived from Stanislavsky. Other approaches might want the actor to start with the meter and finding the metaphors, working as it were, the other way around. Certainly, in long, lyrical poetry like Greek drama, it’s hard for most students to make any sense out of it without some preliminary work on the language. I certainly don’t mean to imply that all of this happens in a day. There is still the matter of learning lines and speaking the words, transforming what we know to what we do. The poet thought first, but then had to find the words. An actor also has to find a physical life for his character; his body must go with his words.

In a typical class, I would spend about an hour working on physical warm-ups and acting exercises. Although the average teacher hasn’t the time to pursue many of these exercises, they expand student perception and may be of use to other teachers. The effect of these exercises is, hopefully, cumulative on the acting student. In portraying a character, an actor must develop his physical and sensory life to go to work automatically. He will change and refine what he does with a character, but he has to start with something.

I will begin our classroom work on poetry by having students read aloud various poems which I will supply. The emphasis will be on being understood. I’m not looking for character at this point, just sense. We’ll examine the punctuation and rhythm, and the speed and audibility of the reader. We will then take several of the poems to examine using the “actor’s approach”. We will continue doing this for several weeks, until everyone has chosen a poem that they want to work on and perform for parents and friends at the end of the quarter. The students will work on their own, deciding and writing down their choices for “where, who and what”. They will memorize their poems and rehearse them in class using these choices. They should try different choices to explore the poems thoroughly. Obviously, different people will do the same character differently, because of what they bring of themselves to a character. The students will determine what props and costuming would be helpful in performing their poems and what kind of lighting they would like. Scenery must be minimal, but levels and the use of the performance space will be discussed. In the final week of the quarter, we will put our “show” together. We will decide how to order the poems. Are there any patterns or themes that we want to utilize in putting the material together? How do we want to arrange the actors? Will they all be on stage at the same time, or enter separately? Although, I will be the director of last resorts, I want the students to be involved with the director’s decisions. The lines are learned, the props and costumes brought in, decisions made and finally, the show goes on.

### **Lesson Plans**

*Oedipus The King* by Sophocles

Second Messenger Speech from *Oedipus Rex*

*Second Messenger*

Shortest to hear and tell—our glorious queen Jocasta’s dead.

*Chorus*

Unhappy woman! How?

## *Second Messenger*

By her own hand. The worst of what was done  
you cannot know. You did not see the sight.  
Yet insofar as I remember it  
you'll hear the end of our unlucky queen.  
When she came raging into the house she went  
straight to her marriage bed, tearing her hair  
with both her hands, and crying upon Laius  
long dead—Do you remember, Laius,  
that night long past which bred a child for us  
to send you to your death and Leave  
a mother making children with her son?  
And then she groaned and cursed the bed in which  
she brought forth husband by her husband, children  
by her own child, an infamous double bond.  
How after that she died I do not know,—  
for Oedipus distracted us from seeing.  
He burst upon us shouting and we looked  
to him as he paced frantically around  
begging us always: Give me a sword, I say,  
to find this wife no wife, this mother's womb,  
this field of double sowing whence I sprang  
and where I sowed my children! As he raved  
some god showed him the way—none of us there.  
Bellowing terribly and led by some  
invisible guide he rushed on the two doors,—  
wrenching the hollow bolts out of their sockets  
he charged inside. There, there, we saw his wife  
hanging, the twisted rope around her neck.  
When he saw her, he cried out fearfully  
and cut the dangling noose. Then, as she lay,  
poor woman, on the ground, what happened after,  
was terrible to see. He tore the brooches—  
the gold chased brooches fastening her robe—  
away from her and lifting them up high  
dashed them on his own eyeballs, shrieking out  
such things as: they will never see the crime  
I have committed or had done upon me!  
Dark eyes, now in the days to come look on  
forbidden faces, do not recognize  
those whom you long for—with such imprecations  
he struck his eyes again and yet again  
with the brooches. And the bleeding eyeballs gushed  
and stained his beard—no sluggish oozing drops

but a black rain and bloody hail poured down.  
So it has broken—and not on one head  
but troubles mixed for husband and for wife.  
The fortune of the days gone by was true  
good fortune—but today groans and destruction  
and death and shame—of all ills can be named  
not one is missing. <sup>2</sup>

The first poem I want to discuss is the Second Messenger's speech from *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles. *Oedipus Rex* is, of course, a play written in verse. This speech is a poem within a play. The actor should read the entire play even if he is going to work on only a small part of it. The author would assume that anyone performing this speech would know the rest of the play.

The teacher should provide, or the actor should look up, information about Greece when this play was written, c. 328 B.C. With a little background information and having read the play as well as the speech, the actor should know that he is in Thebes, outside the King's palace. He is surrounded by villagers. It is daytime, possibly afternoon. There is no indication of the weather, so you can presume it is a normal, clear day. The palace is accessible to the villagers. The King and his family mingled with the people in this courtyard earlier in the day.

The events the messenger is describing took place inside the palace, where the messenger is employed. He saw Jocasta come into the palace and run to her bedroom. She threw herself on to her bed grieving. Then, he and some others heard Oedipus shouting. They were outside the bedroom in a large anteroom when Oedipus stormed in. The messenger didn't see what happened to Jocasta because they were trying to calm Oedipus down. Oedipus kept asking for a sword to kill his wife and demanding to know where she was. They didn't tell him, but guided by some god, he ripped the doors off and found her hanging from a rope, dead. He cut her down. He took her brooches that held her dress together and stabbed their pins into his eyes three times, until blood covered his head.

This summary tells just what happened. I have left out the descriptive words that make the piece dramatic and violent. The words that Sophocles uses give a sense of speed and violence, like the coming of a great storm: "Raging into the house, tearing her hair, crying upon Laius, groaned, cursed, infamous, burst shouting, paced, frantically begging for a sword, bellowing terribly, wrenching, charging, etc." The words are strong and realistic. The only figurative imagery used is to describe the blood, "—no sluggish oozing drops, but a black rain and bloody hail." The blood is like the rain released in a downpour after a storm of thunder and lightning. The language is that of a reporter, which the messenger is.

Who is the messenger? What can I find from the speech and the play? He works for Oedipus and Jocasta. He is the second messenger, perhaps the son of the first messenger, who worked for Oedipus' father Laius. He is probably young and athletic. Messengers were the only source of communication in those times and you had to be fast and strong. He tries to protect Jocasta when Oedipus is looking for her. He doesn't give Oedipus a sword. He expresses sympathy for both of them at the end of the speech. I think the key to his character is in his language. He is the reporter who must tell the story as factually and clearly as he can. He must try to remain morally neutral. He is there to tell the story, not express himself.

What does the messenger want? He wants to tell the villagers the news, shocking and awful as it is. He must prepare them, like a newscaster who must come on T.V. and tell the people that their leader has been killed. The messenger had heard the news of incest and patricide that had preceded his eyewitness account of suicide and self-mutilation. He has the final account of a day of horror.

Sonnet 130 by William Shakespeare

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;  
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;  
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;

If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.  
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,  
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;  
And in some perfumes is there more delight  
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.  
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know  
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;  
I grant I never saw a goddess go;  
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.  
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare  
As any she belied with false compare.

Shakespeare's sonnet 130 is usually described as a satire of some of the excessively romantic odes of his contemporaries. There have certainly been many poems before and since Shakespeare, comparing one's love's beauty to alabaster, roses, stars, etc. It seems to be an excess that dies hard, still to be found on greeting cards. If we look at the poem from a performing point of view, it is a comedy.

The actor assumes that the poet is speaking as himself. That doesn't mean that the actor must think of himself as Shakespeare, though he could if he wanted to. The sonnet is generally thought to be addressed to the Dark Lady who Shakespeare had a tempestuous affair with. She was evidently a ruthless lady, but realistic about herself. Since nobody knows for sure what was going on in Shakespeare's life when he wrote this sonnet, you should be free to play around with it.

No place is given or implied in the sonnet. The character might be sitting at his desk, writing to his mistress. He might be lying on his bed, looking out the window, or walking in a garden, alone with his thoughts. He might be at a pub or out for dinner with male friends, where everyone is comparing girl friends, each trying to top the other with tales about his girl's beauty. The first twelve lines become a reverse put-down in this case, a Shakespearian stand-up comedy routine. The finale couplet emphasizes the real, shared affection the character has with his love. The rhymes might be overly emphasized. Certainly the wilder images; "breasts are dun", "black wires grow on her head", "breath that from my mistress reeks", should be played up. The ninth and tenth lines are the first hint of the reversal at the end. The eleventh and twelfth lines bring us back

to “ground” and sets us up for the punch lines.

If we imagine that he is writing this to his mistress, we will have to imagine the circumstances that preceded the writing. You probably wouldn't send this sonnet to your new love just as a joke.

When someone we love is depressed, feels ugly, miserable, refuses to be cheered up and has lost all sense of humor, we sometimes try the opposite, agreeing with them in an attempt to bring them out of it. The age of the character isn't indicated. If both the man and his love were middle-aged the sonnet could be contrasting the humor and maturity of their relationship to the wordy silliness of youth.

The age can be decided by the actor. The character is certainly a man of education, clever with words and endowed with a sense of humor. He values the real and the permanent in life and his love.

The character wants to entertain. He may want just to amuse us and share with someone the irony of life, or he may want to show someone more forcefully the real values they were overlooking. There are many other possibilities. We're looking for logical human behavior and human behavior has changed remarkably little since man was created.

#### The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter by Ezra Pound

While my hair was still cut straight across my forehead  
I played about the front gate, pulling flowers.  
You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse,  
You walked about my seat, playing with blue plums.  
And we went on living in the village of Chokan:  
Two small people, without dislike or suspicion.  
At fourteen I married My Lord you.  
I never laughed, being bashful.  
Lowering my head, I looked at the wall.  
Called to, a thousand times, I never looked back.  
At fifteen I stopped scowling,  
I desired my dust to be mingled with yours  
Forever and forever and forever.  
Why should I climb the look-out?  
At sixteen you departed,  
You went into far Ku-to-en, by the river of swirling eddies,  
And you have been gone five months.  
The monkeys make sorrowful noise overhead.  
You dragged your feet when you went out.  
By the gate now, the moss is grown; the different mosses,  
Too deep to clear them away!  
The leaves fall early this autumn, in wind.  
The paired butterflies are already yellow with August  
Over the grass in the West garden;  
They hurt me. I grow older.  
If you are coming down through the narrows



of the river Kiang,  
Please let me know beforehand,  
And I will come out to meet you  
As far as Cho-fu-Sa.

One of my favorite poems is *The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter* by Ezra Pound. Although the obvious character is the river-merchant's wife, you could perform the poem as the river merchant when he receives the letter from his wife. The wife is more interesting dramatically since she is actively pursuing something, while he is receiving. Where is the river-merchant's wife? We know she lives in China, and is at her home. It would be a good idea to find some pictures showing Chinese life in the 8th century. The wife talks about the West garden and the mosses that cover the gate. She talks about the monkeys over head, the early falling leaves and "paired butterflies already yellow with August." The actress may decide that she is outside a comfortable house, in late August. She might be sitting on a seat as she did when she was a child and he walked around her "playing with blue plums." Different colored mosses climb the stone gate. What color are they? Leaves blow around her feet. Who is this wife? The actress knows she is sixteen and that her husband has been gone for five months. She was married at fourteen in an arranged marriage she didn't feel ready for. She was bashful then and still is. The formality and shortness of the lines suggest a containment on her part. When she was fifteen she fell in love with her husband.

Her passion took her by surprise. She may not have been able to express the depth of her passion to her husband before he went on his far away journey where "swirling eddies" may threaten him. He dragged his feet when he left, perhaps sensing how much her feelings had changed toward him. She is sad. The delicate "paired butterflies" make her hurt inside. They will die in the fall. She feels so much older. She no longer is a girl as she was when he left. She feels like an older woman, as if her life has passed without her knowing it . . . without knowing it with her husband.

She wants to tell him how much she loves and misses him. She wants to open herself to him in a way she never has. She talks about them as children, about what she felt then and the details she remembers. She admits her scowling rejection of him and declares her passion. In the last three lines she looks for acknowledgement,

If you are coming down through the  
narrows of the river Kiang,  
Please let me know beforehand,  
And I will come out to meet you  
As far as Cho-fu-sa.

She acknowledges him as her lover. She will come to him if he will accept her.

Burial by Alice Walker

I  
They have fenced in the dirt road  
that once led to Wards Chapel

A.M.E. church,  
and cows graze  
among the stones that  
mark my family's graves.  
The massive oak is gone  
from out the church yard,  
but the giant space is left unfilled;  
despite the two-lane blacktop  
that slides across  
the old, unalterable  
roots.

II

Today I bring my own child here;  
to this place where my father's  
grandmother rests undisturbed  
beneath the Georgia sun,  
above her the neatstepping hooves  
of cattle.  
Here the graves soon grow back into the land.  
Have been known to sink. To drop open without  
warning. To cover themselves with wild ivy,  
blackberries. Bittersweet and sage.  
No one knows why. No one asks.  
When Burning Off Day comes, as it does  
some years,  
the graves are haphazardly cleared and snakes  
hacked to death and burned sizzling  
in the brush. . . . the odor of smoke, oak  
leaves, honeysuckle.  
Forgetful of geographic resolutions as birds,  
the farflung young fly South to bury  
the old dead.

III

The old women move quietly up  
and touch Sis Rachel's face.  
"Tell Jesus I'm coming," they say.  
"Tell Him I ain't goin' to be  
long."  
My grandfather turns his creaking head  
away from the lavender box.  
He does not cry. But looks afraid.  
For years he called her "Woman";  
shortened over the decades to  
" 'Oman."  
On the cut stone for " 'Oman's" grave  
he did not notice

they had misspelled her name.

(The stone reads Racher Walker—not “Rachel”—  
Loving Wife, Devoted Mother.)

IV

As a young woman, who had know her? Tripping  
eagerly, “loving wife,” to my grandfather’s  
bed. Not pretty, but serviceable. A hard  
worker, with rough, moist hands. Her own two  
babies dead before she came.

Came to seven children.

To aprons and sweat.

Came to quiltmaking.

Came to canning and vegetable gardens  
big as fields.

Came to fields to plow.

Cotton to chop.

Potatoes to dig.

Came to multiple measles, chickenpox,  
and croup.

Came to water from springs.

Came to leaning houses one story high.

Came to rivalries. Saturday night battles.

Came to straightened hair, Noxzema, and  
feet washing at the Hardshell Baptist church.

Came to zinnias around the woodpile.

Came to grandchildren not of her blood  
whom she taught to dip snuff without  
sneezing.

Came to death blank, forgetful of it all.

When he called her “ ‘Oman” she no longer  
listened. Or heard, or knew, or felt.

V

It is not until I see my first grade teacher  
review her body that I cry.

Not for the dead, but for the gray in my  
first grade teacher’s hair. For memories  
of before I was born, when teacher and  
grandmother loved each other; and later  
above the ducks made of soap and the orange-  
legged chicks Miss Reynolds drew over  
my own small hand  
on paper with wide blue lines.

VI

Not for the dead, but for memories. None of  
them sad. But seen from the angle of her  
death. \*

Burial, by Alice Walker is a contemporary poem by the author of *The Color Purple*. I like her writing very much. This poem also reminds me of a little family graveyard, now surrounded by someone else's fields on the Chesapeake Peninsula where some of my mother's ancestors are buried. The graveyard in this poem is in Georgia. The massive oak that shaded the churchyard and the graves has gone. A highway has replaced the African-Methodist-Episcopal Church. The graveyard is in a field where cattle graze, overgrown with honeysuckle, wild ivy, blackberries, bittersweet and sage. It is a hot summer day. A small group of people including the poet, her child, and her grandfather have come to bury her grandmother, actually her stepgrandmother. The character is the poet, and the words are her thoughts as she watches the proceedings, a transplanted Northerner, home for the funeral.

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The character is an independent woman, long removed from this small, rural Georgia. She is a woman with a child of her own, whose vision of her grandmother "as a young woman" suggests some maturity. There is no mention of her own mother and father, sisters or brothers or fellow grandchildren, suggesting that the larger family has dissolved and that she is the only immediate family member interested and/or able to attend the burial. She is looking at the scene from a certain distance, with detachment. She remembers the years when the graves were burnt off to get rid of the accumulating brush. She remembers sounds "hacking and sizzling snakes" and smells "odor of smoke oak leaves, honeysuckle." She watches the old women talking to her grandmother in her lavender casket. Her grandfather looks frightened rather than sad. Perhaps it is that certain frightened look some old people have and you wonder whether that is the only emotion they have left. He doesn't even notice the misspelling of his wife's name on her grave stone. The character realizes her grandmother was treated as an outsider by her grandfather and by his children, the seven children she raised. To have no children takes away status. She was "serviceable" and served; not Rachel but "Oman". If you have no blood kin, you have to do for others. The character sees her grandmother uncomplaining, always doing, an unending litany in italics in the poem. In the end she neither "heard nor knew or felt." The character sees her first grade teacher and the grey in her hair. The detachment goes and memories flood in: The love between her grandmother and her teacher, of "paper with wide blue lines." A string of memories connected to her grandmother comes to mind.

The character wants to awaken her memories and she also wants to keep her distance. She wants to assert herself and be what she is now, capable of objectivity about her past. We've all known that feeling, particularly at family gatherings, or when we've come back from some place no one else in the family has been. We want to be unique, different from the rest of them. We also want to belong, to be part of a family, as Rachel never quite was. She belonged to her friend long ago when they were young.

## **Conclusion**

There are many ways of teaching poetry. When I first started working on this unit, I was looking for a way for me to use in my classes. Poetry is ideal beginning text work for actors, because it can encompass a whole story or idea in a shorter time than a full length play. Since poetry is usually meant to be read aloud it lends itself to acting problems of diction and audibility. The actor's job is to communicate human ideas, emotions and actions. In the process of working on a character in a play, there will be many ideas, emotions and actions that have to be portrayed. Reciting a poem offers a chance to work on one or two in depth, and attain a finished product.

The approach to poetry I suggest is designed for students of acting. I think it is valid for other classes as well. The student is forced to become involved sensorily with the poem. He has to bring his own thoughts and feelings to bear in order to get into the poem. This helps his own process of self-discovery and gives him a personal investment in poetry, not just as words on a page to be deciphered, but as the unique language of a human being as real as he.

## Appendix I

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My class time is 2 1/2 hours, longer than regular classroom periods. I find that 2 1/2 hours is too long a time to work on any one thing in the average class. I will work on poetry with my class for an hour, two days a week for an eight week period. We usually have a presentation for friends and parents at the end of this period and during that last week I will devote the full time to organizing and rehearsing the poems the students have selected to perform.

The lesson plans suggest some games and exercises to develop sensory awareness, concentration and interaction with fellow students. These games and exercises, as well as many others, will be used with “an actor’s approach to poetry”, which I have described in the body of my unit.

### *Physical Warm-Ups*

I usually begin a class with some kind of physical warm-up. The warm-up not only develops students physically, but also develops group concentration and hopefully, gets some blood to the brain.

Ex. 1. The class arranges themselves in a large circle. Stand up straight; medium stance (legs lined up under the hips), chest up, shoulders down, head straight on top of the spine, arms and hands relaxed, knees unlocked. We do a series of stretching and moving exercises designed to isolate and strengthen different parts of the body.

Ex. 2. The class sits on chairs or lies on the floor. Starting with your toes, tense them and then relax them several times. Go on to the feet and do the same thing. Move on to the ankles and so forth, moving up the body. Try to isolate each part. Finally, tense the entire body and then, relax it.

Ex. 3. In a large circle, toss a broom handle from person to person. Be sure you make eye-contact with the person you are tossing

to. If the broom handle hits the floor, everyone falls to the floor until the handle has stopped rolling. Continue the same exercise while jogging.

Ex. 4. In a circle, pass an imaginary ball that changes weight and size (teacher calls changes). Pass and receive an imaginary ball with your head; with your shoulder, with your knee, with your stomach, etc.

### *Sensory Awareness*

Ex. 1. Heads on desks, eyes closed, or, eyes closed, lying on the floor. Relax, no talking and don’t try to move around. Listen for sounds inside yourself and on your body. Can you hear yourself breathing? Can you hear your heart beating, your stomach growling? Does your clothing make any sounds? Now listen for sounds in the

room you are in What do you hear and what does it sound like? Concentrate on hearing sounds in the room and what does it sound like? Concentrate on hearing sounds in the room next to you or in the hall. See if you can hear anything in the office or a room further away. Finally, listen for any sounds you can hear outdoors. When students have completed the exercises, discuss what everyone heard.

Ex. 2. The teacher has a bag of objects that can be held in one hand, of various shapes, materials and textures; an onion, a toothbrush, a tapemeasure, etc. Each student puts his/her hand into the bag, without looking, and must describe the first object that he/she touches. They must not tell us what the object is! They should describe the general shape or shapes; a circle, a rectangle, a cube, etc. Is the object rough or smooth? What material/materials is it made of? The class tries to guess what the object is.

Ex. 3. The teacher asks the class what they have seen since the last class. What did they notice that they hadn't seen before, or that they saw differently, or had changed? What did they feel about what they saw? You're not looking for a big deal here. You want students to be aware of the normal details we don't think about and take for granted, like a sneaker in the gutter.

Ex. 4. Have students relax at their desks or on the floor. Ask them to think back to when they were younger (it doesn't matter how much younger) and remember a smell they liked. Have them describe the smell and why they liked it. Ask them what they associate with that smell.

### *Concentration*

Ex. 1. "What's The Object of the Game?" This was described in the body of the unit. There are as many variations on this game as anyone can think of. You can assign students to invent a variation. It shouldn't get too obscure or everyone will give up, so work out some guidelines depending on your group. The most obvious are to have something visual, if everyone can see each other, but there is no reason why you can't go into word or number games.

The teacher starts by observing the students, who are seated in a circle, clearly visible to all. The teacher announces that she has received the book she's holding from the person on her right, "face up," if the student to her right is wearing sneakers. If the student is wearing something other than sneakers, she announces that she has received the book, "face down." She passes the book to her left, saying, "I received this book up/down and I pass it to you (checking the shoes of the student to her left), "face up/down". The student to the teacher's left may have been handed the book face up, because she is wearing sneakers, but, when the student announces how she received the book it is dependent on whether the teacher is wearing sneakers or not.

The book continues around the circle until everyone "gets the game." Crossed arms or legs is another version, again based on the people on either side of you. The book is passed and received "up" if the arms or legs of the person next to you are crossed. Since a person may cross or uncross their legs and arms frequently, what was received "up" one time, may shift the second time around the circle.

Ex. 2. The students form a circle. Each student chooses a very simple movement, such as, bending your knees or raising one hand. These movements will be done sequentially to a count of eight. The teacher counts the beats. The next student does his/her movement on the first beat. The next student does his/her movement on the second beat, and so forth. Each student adds in, taking as many counts of eight as they need before jumping in. If there are more than eight students, the ninth student and the first student will be performing their movements at the same time.

## Group Interaction

Ex. 1. One student stands or sits with his/her eyes closed. The other students are to touch that student, one by one, in a pleasant way. Emphasize pleasant! Every student will get a chance to be "it". After everyone has had a turn, discuss the students' reactions and sensations. Did you trust your fellow students? Did anyone take advantage of the "it's" vulnerability?

Ex. 2. The students are divided into equal numbered groups; say, four groups of five. The teacher gives each group the name of an animal. Each group collectively must become their animal. The class tries to guess what animal they are portraying.

Ex. 3. One student thinks of a place. The place should be a place that could accommodate the entire class; a supermarket, a cafeteria, etc. The student comes forward and starts doing something that a person in this place might do. When a fellow student thinks that he/she knows what the place is, he/she joins the first student, becoming another character doing something. The game continues, adding in students. It is important that the students relate to each other and respect any imaginary objects like doors and tables that have been previously established.

Ex. 4. Create a group story. Decide on the type of story; adventure, mystery, fairy tale, gothic romance. Decide which students have the beginning of the story . . . the middle . . . the end. A student starts the story. The teacher calls "pass" when she feels it is time to pass on to the next student.

## Appendix II

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This is a list of some modern and contemporary poems that will be used in this unit.

Emily Dickinson,	<i>Of Course I Prayed</i> <i>I Heard a Fly Buzz When I Died</i> <i>There's a Certain Slant of Light</i>
Edwin Arlington Robinson,	<i>Richard Corey</i>
Amy Lowell,	<i>Patterns</i>
Robert Frost,	<i>The Death of the Hired Man</i> <i>Home Burial</i> <i>The Witch of Coos</i> <i>Paul's Wife</i>
William Carlos Williams,	<i>This Is Just To Say</i> <i>The Last Words of My English Grandmother</i>
D. H. Lawrence,	<i>Snake</i>
e. e. cummings,	<i>Somewhere I Have Never Travelled, Gladly Beyond</i> <i>in Just-spring</i> <i>she being Brand-new</i> <i>since feeling is first</i>



	<i>If there are any heavens somewhere i have never travelled pity this busy monster, manunkind what if a much of a which of a wind Item</i>
Frederico Garcia Lorca,	<i>Dawn</i>
Frank O'Hara,	<i>The Day Lady Died</i>
John Ashbury,	<i>The Instruction Manual</i>
Gary Snyder,	<i>Siwashing it out Once in Siuslaw Forest An Autumn Morning in Shokoku-Ji</i>
LeRoi Jones,	<i>Air</i>
Frank Bidart,	<i>Ellen West</i>
Langston Hughes,	<i>Madam poems In Explanation of Our Times Consider Me The Negro Mother Morning After Sunday Morning Prophecy</i>
Cleopatra Mathis,	<i>Two Memories</i>
Lawrence Ferlinghetti,	<i>Dog I Am Waiting Pictures of the Gone World—#9</i>
Carl Sandburg,	<i>Ten Definitions of Poetry Chicago Grass Four Preludes on Playthings of the Wind , "The Past is a Bucket of Ashes."</i>
Ezra Pound,	<i>The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter</i>
T. S. Eliot,	<i>The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock</i>
Edna St. Vincent Millay,	<i>Renascence Departure</i>
Elizabeth J. Coatsworth,	<i>A Lady Comes to An Inn</i>
Stephen Vincent Benet,	<i>Love Came By From the Riversmoke</i>
Kenneth Fearing,	<i>American Rhapsody (4)</i>
Kenneth Patchen,	<i>Do the Dead Know What Time It Is ?</i>
Muriel Rukeyser,	<i>Effort at Speech Between Two People</i>
Randall Jarrell,	<i>Jews at Haifa</i>
Anne Sexton,	<i>Cinderella</i>
Al,	<i>Cuba, 1962</i>
Michael Dennis Browne,	<i>Power Failure Paranoia</i>
Lucille Clifton,	<i>In Salem</i>
Rita Dove,	<i>This Life</i>

Norman Dubie,	<i>In the Dead of the Night</i>
Stephen Dunn,	<i>On Hearing the Airlines Will Use a Psychological Profile to Catch Potential Skyjackers</i>
Susan Feldman,	<i>Lamentations Of AnAu Pair Girl</i>
Kathleen Fraser,	<i>Poem in Which My Legs Are Accepted</i>
Tess Gallagher	<i>Stepping Outside</i>
Gary Gildner,	<i>Meeting in the Reincarnation Analyst</i>
Thomas James,	<i>Letter to a Mute</i>
Greg Kuzna,	<i>The Monster</i>
Fred Levinson,	<i>a poem against rats</i>
William Matthews,	<i>The Cat</i>
Angela McCabe,	<i>Blind Adolphus</i>
Paul Monette,	<i>Bathing the Aged</i>
Carol Muske,	<i>Child with Six Fingers</i>
Jack Myers,	<i>The Apprentice Painter</i>
Greg Pape,	<i>La Llorona</i>
	<i>October</i>
Lawrence Raab,	<i>The Assassin's Fatal Error</i>
Ira Sadoff,	<i>A Concise History of the World</i>
	<i>My Father's Leaving</i>
Kathleen Spivack,	<i>A Child's Visit to the Biology Lab</i>
Maura Stanton,	<i>The All-Night Waitress</i>
Alice Walker,	<i>Expect Nothing</i>
	<i>Burial</i>

## Notes

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1. Traugott Lawler, Poetry Seminar.
2. Sophocles, translated by David Grene. *Oedipus The King* . New York: Washington Sq. Press, 1972.

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