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Working With Poetry: An Actor's Approach

Guide for Curriculum Unit 85.01.06
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This unit approaches the teaching of poetry from an actor's point of view. I have described the actor's approach to discovering his character in scripted material and applied this technique to analyzing four poems. I have included theatre games sad exercises designed to strengthen students' physical and sensory awareness and a list of fifty contemporary poems that can be dramatized. There are, of course, many other poems from the past and present that lend themselves to dramatization.

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 it in my classes. Poetry is an ideal beginning text work for actors, because it can encompass a whole story or ides 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 an audibility. The actor's job is to communicate human ideas, emotions, an actions. In the process of working on a character in a play, there will be many ideas, emotions, and actions that have been 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.

(Recommended for English and Drama classes, grades 9 through 12)

Key Words

Poetry Writing Instruction