



Poetry For Remedial Seventh and Eighth Graders with Selections from Ballads, Emily Dickinson, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Julia de Burgos

Curriculum Unit 85.01.08
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Poetry is a suitable method for teaching comprehension skills in the middle school. It is succinct. A ballad or a short poem can contain in itself many poetic devices which also apply to prose. The language of poetry makes the reader more aware of nuances of meaning and will deepen his thinking power as critical and appreciative skills develop. A good poem, carefully selected, can be read, analyzed, and imitated, all in one class period without abridging thinking processes.

The remedial reader has little tolerance for long assignments. Such a pupil becomes bored quickly and with loss of interest the usefulness of a unit is over. With this special consideration in mind what is presented here is designed to appeal to remedial seventh and eighth graders and to provide them with pleasure and enjoyment.

The first step in this appeal is to introduce the unit with a tape developed by some of my seventh grade girls. They have written lyrics and sing as a group to an instrumental background. The purpose at the onset is to rivet the attention of the group to what a few can do with music and poetry.

No attempt will be made to include biographical or regional emphasis in this unit. It is my intent to present poetry which would have universal appeal. I would like to speak to my students from time to time about the fact that powerful words transcend regions and other accidents of nature. Reaction to moving words is a pleasure common to all kinds of people and in all points of history.

Within the limits of this unit I will introduce several ballads. I will begin with Robin Hood. "Robin Hood and Allan-a-Dale", "Robin Hood and the Widow's Sons", and "Robin Hood's Death" will be the selection at this point. Then I will cover "Sir Peter's Leman", "Sweet William", and "Barbara Allen". The section of ballads will conclude with "Frankie and Albert" and "Stagolee". Next I will present three American poets, coincidentally women. They are Emily Dickinson, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Julia de Burgos. Instructional plans, briefly stated, will be included. In addition a teaching materials resource package has been developed and it is available in the Teachers Institute Library.

The instructional objectives for all of the lessons are simple. A. The student will recognize who is telling the story in the poem, or who is singing or speaking its thought; and B. what is said—a feeling, a description, a story, or a prayer. The students will examine each poem to identify its devices and patterns. All lessons will

begin with the students' oral reading of the poem and as often as possible I will tape these readings. First, the ongoing improvement in the oral presentation is valuable for the teacher as an assessment of progress and fluency, and second, students like everyone enjoy hearing their own voices. It's good motivation. All lessons will conclude with an effort by the students to write a phrase or a line of their own.

I will begin in September by asking the children to write their own lyrics for a taped instrumental of their own choice. Popular stories from magazines, newspapers, or tv will provide the material for these modern ballads. Everyone will be encouraged to take part and reasonable guidelines for discussion will be laid out.

A desirable side effect of this unit will be the pupil's growing regard for their own opinions and with that a respect for themselves and for others. The basic element in this part of the class management is self-control and its importance cannot be minimized. In addition, it is also in the plan that they each keep a weekly log of the poems which are covered in class. Whatever they write of their own invention will be kept there too. As a Chapter I teacher I am required to keep a set of instructional objectives plus the work which each pupil does in a folder which can be examined at any time by coordinators from the city, state, or federal government. These instructional goals and plans are derived from the general building plans for improvement. Improvement in reading comprehension is one of the school's primary goals. The accumulated poetry and their growing awareness would hopefully add to the pupils' capacity to generalize and understand.

Pupils who have great difficulty in thinking skills quite often at seventh and eighth grade levels exhibit strain when they are expected to use more sophisticated critical and appreciative skills. The task is not so hard when they have to recall a detail, main idea, or a sequence. But when the questions deal with the characters and their traits, or if they are asked to describe a feeling or a mood in a story, they simply draw a blank. First they have difficulty finding the words to articulate their ideas, and second, they have not been asked to think on this level before. When a remedial child leaves the thinking of the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade level behind, and is handling level for the first time, he is adrift.

In junior highschool, or middle school, remediation is complicated by the need to engage the pupils in a thinking process of some depth. I'm not talking about a problem-solving activity which has some discrete answer or predictable reply. I'm speaking of those problems which do not have easy answers, those predicaments which can be looked at from many different sides and would have many possible explanations. Remedial students, if not most teenage students, are not accustomed to having others, parents or teachers, place much value on their ideas. This is critical. We do not tell them what to think, but encourage them to think for themselves. This is very heady wine for those who have never tasted it before.

The advantage of encouraging such participation in open discussion is that it promotes broader thinking. In the exchange between differing opinions the student is exposed to more than one style of thinking and more than one opinion about a poem. The poem itself is relatively easy to read and it can be orally read within a few minutes. This leaves more than adequate time to discuss its meaning and to delve into the technicalities of its composition. The actual teaching time for a single period of instruction at the middle school is between thirty-five and forty-five minutes. The oral reading, the discussion, the analysis, and the original writing time can easily be contained within that time frame. From time to time it would be a good idea to review what has been covered from three or four weeks of previous assignments and to add comparison to the discussion.

In poetry a reader can find all of the comprehension skills of prose reading condensed into a short lesson. Through discussion which is carefully structured, and through questions which expand critical and appreciative thinking, this level of learning is digested. The written part of the lesson which is accumulated in a student's folder becomes an ongoing history of his development.

Poetry can do this in surprising ways. During the past three years, part of my remedial program included the reading of Shakespeare in unabridged form. My classes have read "Othello" and "Julius Caesar". It was with some considerable surprise that I found that some of my pupils were very responsive. The pupils who showed the most pleasure were eager to read aloud. They vied with each other for certain roles. They took great pleasure in examining the notes on the left side of the page and matching them to the lines on the right.

Another surprise was that the kind of student who was most alert to the story and characters in the plays was not the student who was doing the best work in individualized material. Rather, it was the child who was more socially aware, sometimes more mature, and the child who could discuss difficult human situations with insight. This is often the remedial child who has the most difficulty with the technical aspects of reading. Perhaps they are better listeners; perhaps better people watchers. Whatever the reason, over a period of several weeks the fluency of the oral readers improved tremendously. The obvious enjoyment they gained was noisy. For the few children this kind of material genuinely touched, it was well worth the effort. Some even went to our library to read further.

It was all poetry. Then I presented a homework assignment which was relatively successful. The task was to write a poem on any subject and attempt a rhyming scheme, but not allow that to thwart the poem. The results were good. From this I decided that it would be well worth the planning to try to develop a year long assignment in poetry reading and discussion, followed by some simple creative writing.

These peripheral ideas are not original with me. They have been used by skillful teachers for a long time. I would not characterize either the selection of poetry or the management of discussion as points I could take credit for. What is new to my knowledge is the application of such ideas to remedial students. Material is not generally offered to them with much depth. And yet they are capable of grasping many of the ideas contained in good poems. The experiences of their lives have often brought them insights which we generally assign to older and mature people. It is a recognition that they are mature and can handle such subject matter which places a different dimension to the instruction. Whatever the pupil has to say should be accepted; eventually he will learn to interchange ideas freely and spontaneously with his peers and others without rancor or anger at differences. The teacher is always there to encourage and stimulate. When the right moment arrives, the teacher can cultivate an awareness of what is an appropriate response, and develop a sense of judgment about what is off the wall and what falls into the realm of reasonable interpretation. This comes after. The pupil has to feel secure first. The years that disappointment and failure have hardened into destructive attitudes will not disappear quickly. For some it may not at all. With patience for most it will fade and for some it will disappear. The capacity to wait is worth the sacrifice. It's a tribute to pedagogy that most teachers do this instinctively anyhow. For the purposes of this unit it has, nonetheless, been said.

I will introduce the legendary outlaw, Robin Hood, with the ballads "Robin Hood and Allan-a-Dale" and "Robin Hood and the Widow's Sons", as I said. Both have direct and easily understood stories. Two other possible choices with good tales to tell are "True Thomas" and "King John and the Abbot of Canterbury". (See Untermeyer's *The Golden Treasury of Poetry* .) These will be added if the pupils need extra reading and recalling of stories. All will be read orally and the discussion will be simple. Who is telling this story? What is the story about? Ballads lend themselves to an easy discovery of rhyming patterns. Each pupil will have his own copy of the ballads, and should be able to discern the regular rhyming pattern of a,b,c,b without difficulty.

The ballad of "Robin Hood's Death" (See Leach's *The Ballad Book*) finishes the narrative poems centering on the hero's life and death. The last is taken from an incomplete text and speaks of the treachery and battle before Robin dies. The ballad tradition states that he was born in Locksly in Yorkshire, and in the ballad "Robin

Hood and Queen Katherine” that he practiced archery at Finsbury. This was a green outside London laid out for the practice of archery. These facts would be exciting to a remedial pupil because they imply verification of his life. Discussion of this should be lively. The stories of how Little John, Will Scarlet, and Allen-a-Dale entered Robin’s band would be subjects for out of class reading. Stories of his life and exploits are abundant and if interest is high a small matter to explore.

It is my intention to supply the pupils with copies of the narratives as they have been transcribed in archaic English, using spellings such as “neuer” (never), “haue (have), and words such as “heare”, “selfe”, and “noe”. Alongside this I will provide a translation. The point made is that English, like all living tongues, changes constantly. We cannot read the English language of the twelfth century without study, but we can recognize the basic wordstock. Providing at least one poem with archaic English opens another view of history through language.

Each pupil will have his own copy of poems to mark freely. After “translation” and finding the rhyming pattern he will be asked to retell the story orally. Ways of writing this down could vary. In the beginning it might be better to write a composite of what they recall on the board and have them copy the complete narrative. Two or three lessons in which the language of the summary is controlled by the teacher will ensure a better product once the pupil is expected to write his own précis.

It also might be great fun to update the language of one of the Robin Hood tales to make the tale and dialogue more contemporary. Pupils grouped into two’s or three’s could rewrite each stanza and present the finished rewritten group effort together. The possibility exists that they might improve the beat as well as the rhyme.

Following the Robin Hood ballads would be “Sir Peter’s Leman”. This ballad is told in couplets and recites a gruesome story. Young Kirsteen is jilted by her lover and he marries another. In revenge she burns them up along with a large number of maidens and knights unfortunate enough to be in the building when she sets the fire. This is the story of jilted love, rage, and vengeance. They’ll love it.

After the identification of the couplet and some interpretation of archaic language we will notice imagery as displayed by the color red. There is sufficient use of scarlet and red in this poem to point out that it is indicative of the violent feeling in the story. There is enough to awaken the awareness of the use of color in poetry not just for its imagery but for its effect on mood.

The use of couplets in this ballad allows the teacher to spend time “tapping” out the beat of each line. This will help the student to recognize meter as an important focus in the writing of poetry. Sufficient time should be allowed at this point for the beginning of their own narratives, written in couplets, and hopefully a more steady rhythm. I intend to use class time and give help. If a second session is needed, I will provide it. I will accept anything. When they’re finished, I will type them out and put them on display.

The next sessions would be to present “Sweet William” and to continue to expand the understanding of imagery. In this story Lydia Margaret learns that Sweet William has spurned her to marry another. Her ghost visits him on his marriage night. He is shaken by the vision of the night and seeks her out. When he finds her body, he is overwhelmed and shortly after, dies. The poem closes with the blooming of a red rose that spreads over Lydia Margaret’s grave to cover Sweet William,s.

This ballad has four-line stanzas with the conventional rhyming pattern. The story is a preparation for the hardhearted lover story of Barbara Allen. It’s a tragic love story, a jilting and then a repentance. There are

abrupt changes in the story from one stanza to another, which leaves gaps in the story to be filled in by the reader's imagination. In some ways to me this story lends itself to dramatization. If the class is motivated, there might be parts of it that could be expanded by dialogue. Perhaps a brief one-act play could be written, particularly using stanzas 1-4, and 9-14.

Barbara Allen is presented in this unit in four different versions. The first, A., is English; the second, B., comes from Virginia; C., is from Mississippi; and the last is a version in heavy Black dialect. Any version would be acceptable for analysis. The music possible to demonstrate the many different versions of this story is what I would look for here. Popular folk singers of many backgrounds could be drawn on to give a change in atmosphere in presenting this ballad. This would precede the looking up of special words. "Martinmas" means St. Martin's Mass, November 11. The dialect is Scotch. The story is blunt; of a hard-hearted girl. The second version, which is Virginian, places the story in Scotland. She meets his corpse after the repudiation and she smiles. By stanza ten she is withering and dying herself. In the last stanza a red rose entwines with a brier on a church steeple. Striking similarities exist to "Sweet William". In the version from Mississippi the story takes place in May and Barbara is not-Barbry, a man. The rhyming pattern is more loosely constructed than in previous versions, but the repetition of Barbry Allen and words that loosely rhyme Allen, such as dwelling, falling, lying, and dying, hold the stanzas together. A song in this version would have great impact, because the name would be the refrain.

The Black dialect version, "Barb-ree Allin," adheres closely to the one from Virginia. It is interesting that "Sweet Willie" in this story courted her for seven years and then sickened from her rejection. There is also a stanza that accuses him of unfaithfulness of some kind when she taunts him because he was toasting other girls at a party. He explains that it was for love of her. There is a rose, a brier, and a steeple at the close. In this ballad there is a lot of conversation between the two leading figures. This would be a good assignment for the students. Write down the conversation you hear and record it accurately as a dialogue. The point of such a lesson would be the accurate reproduction of the speech patterns of their own family and friends. The listening ear for such an assignment would be invaluable in developing ballads of their own, as the story would then have credibility because of carefully constructed dialogue.

The reason for choosing this ballad is to show the students that songs and poems travel geographically and through time. Each place sets its own flavor on the story and imprints its own charm. The Black versions become the introduction for the next two ballads, "Frankie and Albert" (Johnnie) and "Stagolee".

"Frankie and Albert" has five-line stanzas. The fifth line is the refrain. The story is supposedly based on a real event and that is useful in encouraging the pupils to develop their own full length ballads. By this time they should be telling short stories in three or four stanzas of four lines, or any number of couplets. Now in whatever form they are comfortable they can attempt a full ballad.

"Stagolee" has a three-line stanza and the third line is a refrain. Two versions are included and the story is of violence and a bad end. Black rural speech is very much a part of this ballad. The stark and brutal story lends itself to some kind of dramatic enlargement. The number of characters is limited. There is a narrator.

The two versions of "Frankie and Johnnie" and "Stagolee" finish the section on ballad reading, analysis, and writing. None of the ballads test the pupil's capacity to unravel complicated poetic devices. What is intended in to build an awareness of the power of a good story, sung or recited. The cadence of language and the variety of stanzas is enough to see the structure of the poems, but not intricate or overwhelming. It is hoped that at the least they could produce a line or a couplet, and at the best write a simple dramatization or a full length ballad of their own. If a pupil sings or enjoys the musical ballads, it might be possible to produce a

song. Certainly it is hoped they will have had fun, and will be prepared for reading the three major poets who constitute the final part of the unit.

Emily Dickinson will be the first major poet we will deal with. There are some thirty-seven Xeroxed pages of her nature poetry in the Teachers Institute resource package to provide a wide choice for oral reading. It is from this bulk that several will be chosen to examine thoroughly. Two which have patterns similar to the ballad, "Summer Shower" and "The Sea of Sunset", will make a useful transition.

The vocabulary to define first in "Summer Shower" is eaves, gables, conjectured, replaced, hoisted, jocosor, spangles, dejected, lutes, glee, and fete. Then questions. Do gables laugh? (personification) Does the sunshine throw things? Does the poet use a consistent rhyming pattern? If so, how is it described? What pictures (imagery) stay in your mind because of their vividness? (Orchard spangles hung.) This poem is, I think, a good choice to show how personification as a device can take flight with word pictures that are easy to recognize and are obviously enjoyable. The writing exercise would be to invent some personifications and images of our own. Just one or two would be sufficient if well thought out.

The next poem would be "The Sea of Sunset". The vocabulary is strews, opal, bales, merchantmen, poise, and horizons. Questions. What is the western mystery? What gems does the poet use in this poem to make her imagery bright? Did she use similar imagery in "Summer Shower"? What is the rhyming pattern of this poem? What sounds does she repeat many times (alliteration) and where does she place these sounds? Are they always at the beginnings of words? What is being said in these two poems? Who do you think is talking and what is the point of each?

Can you write two or three words which use precious stones to help your description? What can you write that would include alliteration? Try to write a four-line stanza and include personification and alliteration. Try to regulate the meter and see if you can develop an image, possibly through color, which will add to the mood.

Emily Dickinson wrote wonderful poetry. Remedial students will certainly enjoy her poems, but unless the class shows a real maturity in grasping internal rhyme and is able to articulate some of the complex images and ideas, it would be misplaced to dwell on them. Her use of poetic devices is many-faceted. It is better to be satisfied with the recognition of a device, and some inchoate imitation, than to stay too long on one poem. The choices which follow are "A Day", "The pedigree of honey", "There's a certain slant of light", "Indian Summer", and "November". They are suggestions. A simple work plan is presented here for them.

Vocabulary "A Day": steeple, bobolinks, and dominie. There are two parts to this poem Does it tell a story? What does it do?

Notice the alliteration in the repetition of "s" sounds in the first stanza. Notice "sun", "rose", "steeple", "swam", "amethyst", and "squirrels". There is a simile here too. "The news like squirrels ran".

In the second stanza there is personification. "The hills untied their bonnets,". The rhyming pattern is like that of the ballads. Who or what is the dominie in gray?

Write a two part poem. Describe something you like. The first line you write should be the beginning of what you describe, and the second line its end. Expand your idea and see if you can use similes and alliteration at the same time.

Vocabulary "The pedigree of honey": pedigree, clover, aristocracy. Why does the bee in this poem believe

clover is noble? Look carefully at the meter in this poem. It is very short. Look at the rhyme. Now pick something simple and plain in nature that you see all the time. Write one line about it. Do you have a complete idea, as in a sentence? If not, finish the idea. Then cut out extra and unnecessary words and substitute better ones to make sense in what you want to say with three beats or four. What was Emily Dickinson telling the reader in her poem and what are you trying to tell your reader with yours?

The poem which begins "There's a certain slant of light" is one of her poems which deals with death. She brings this idea into many of her poems. For the purposes of this unit it is a good choice to introduce a different mood.

Vocabulary "A certain slant of light": oppresses, cathedral, internal, imperial, affliction, 'tis, and landscape. Questions. Who is talking here; What is talked about? Is this poem lighthearted? How would you describe its mood? What is mood?

In the first stanza would you say that this description is a happy one? What does the second stanza mean to you? What hurts? Think about this set of lines, because you can't understand it except in what you're told in the first stanza. Now look at the last stanza. "Shadows hold their breath" is a personification. The lines . . . "tis like the distance On the look of death." is a simile.

How many beats do you count to each line? Is the rhythm steady? What about the rhyming pattern? Is it familiar? Where have you seen this before?

Try to write four lines with a steady rhythm on a subject which to you is not happy. It does not have to be very sad, but definitely something which does not make you happy. Pick an idea of your own and write four sentences about it. Prune the language so you develop a steady beat.

This poem was picked because it is haunting, meditative and somber. It talks of death. It is a preparation for Julia de Burgos. Not all poetry is happy and this one is a solemn reflection on death as felt in the peculiar light of an afternoon in winter. Some of the discussion could center on how light, a sunny day, a rainy day, night, and wintertime affect our mood.

Vocabulary "Indian Summer": sophistries, fraud, plausibility, induces, ranks, altered, timid, sacrament, communion, haze, sacred, emblem, partake, consecrated, thine, immortal. Questions. Why does she use a lot of words to remind us of church? Why does she want a child to participate? Who is the child?

"Indian Summer" has three-line stanzas. The meter and rhyming pattern are different from the others. Some of the lines rhyme and others do not. It is a definite change in mood. Examine the meter and rhyme carefully to see how the poet does this. This poem is exuberant. Imitate this. Dream up something bright and vivid and write three lines. Concentrate on the meter to imitate a beat which makes the reader feel exuberant.

The last poem of this poet begins as a description and ends as a prayer. It is "November".

Vocabulary "November"; prosaic, incisive, ascetic, eves, sheaves, bustle, spicy, valves, mesmeric, sentiments. Questions. What is asked for in this poem? What does the request have to do with a description such as this? Notice that this poem has a familiar rhyming pattern and a steady rhythm. See if you can write two lines which describe and then ask for something. Can you sing your two lines? What kind of music would you pick or invent for such a song? Could you write a hymn?

Gwendolyn Brooks, the second poet in the unit, is contemporary. Her poetry for children is very appealing. She

takes the everyday experiences of children for her subjects and takes the titles from their names. Her little book of poems, *Bronzeville Boys and Girls*, is the result. (There are sixteen of her children's poems in the resource package to draw from.) In "Cynthia in the Snow" the delight of a little girl in snow is charming. She invents words, "flutter-twitthers"; uses alliteration freely: "laughs a lovely whiteness, And whitely whirs away."; and similes such as "white as milk". These are all poetic devices centering on everyday things which children can easily grasp. There is a fun in the language which entices them, and none of the subjects is treated in a way hard for them to understand.

In the poem "John Who Is Poor" she speaks of the loneliness of the child who is left alone. His mother works all the time and this is necessary because his father has died. She asks children to be kind to such a child in ways that only a child can be kind. This poem touches on the hardship in many children's lives, and she treats it without being patronizing.

In "Skipper" a small child meets death in the loss of his pet goldfish. The child tries to help the sickened fish and is not successful. Then with tenderness he buries the pet and asks the garden tree to protect him in his backyard grave. This poem is instructive because she speaks to children about the care of the sick and dying; and when all else fails making provision for suitable burial. Serious matters, but again not too heavy or difficult for a remedial child to understand or handle.

This is the section of the unit when I would ask the pupils to reach into their own lives and write a poem about some serious matter that has touched them. The first step would be to write down the event or cause of unhappiness without making any attempt to develop a series of regular lines or a rhyme. The next step would be to examine those words and phrases which can be carefully selected to be the skeleton of the poem. The third step would be to focus on the technical ingredients, adding alliteration, personification, color, imagery and similes, and rigidly try to adhere to metric consistency and a pattern of rhyme. Does the language fit into a two, three, or four line stanza? Review the language again to see if the basic idea has been distorted in any way. What is hoped from this stage of discipline is that the student will become more sensitive to the exact word or phrase to express his ideas, and be willing to ruthlessly discard anything which detracts from the central feeling or idea. This activity represents the solemn side of poetry as imitative of Gwendolyn Brooks. There is another side.

The prose writing of Gwendolyn Brooks is filled with everyday references which any writer, remedial or otherwise, can use. From her novel, *Maud Martha*, in the first three pages of description she focuses on the common dandelion.

"Yellow jewels for everyday, studding the patched green dress of her back yard". In the second chapter she describes children entering a schoolyard in November as "Bits of pink, of blue, white, yellow, green, purple, brown, black, carried by jerky little stems of brown or yellow or brown-black," . . . Her use of color to present vivid pictures in the mind is followed by a glut of homely detail. Anyone who has gone to a brown brick school in the past forty years would identify with such a description.

Later in the same book she describes her family tradition at Christmas. Once again the details are replete. Each one in the family is mentioned. The food they ate, how members of the family acted, what they used for decoration, and how they felt.

All of these vignettes in the life of Maud Martha can each be a specific writing lesson. In the description of one's school, club, church, and family holidays and trips the remedial child composes his own history. Encouraging children to use extravagant language in their own descriptions of everyday things will develop a

feeling of intimacy in the awareness of the power of words. Descriptions of what is close to one's heart and the sharing of them with others in a supportive atmosphere opens wide the door to poetic expression. It is just that small step from the prose description to the poetic description which is the hurdle to overcome.

The written descriptions do not have to be long. Time should be provided to think up colorful words, to remember details, and to permit freedom of expression. In doing such an assignment the student addresses that point at which poetic prose and poetry, unrhymed, overlap.

The last poet presented in this unit is Julia de Burgos, who was a most unhappy woman. Her poetry reflects a consuming misery. She was Puerto Rican and most of her poems, if not all but one, are written in Spanish. Her last was in English, "Farewell in Welfare Island". (Her poetry for this unit is taken from *Antolog'a Poética*, 1968. The translations which are provided here have been done by my friend, Maria Crocetti. The Spanish text and the English translations are in the resource package.) She died on the streets of New York City and her body was identified by her friend, Emilio M. Colon, editor of *Antolog'a Poética*. Although the details of her life are grim and her experiences and ideas not comfortable or easy, she was a good poet. I will point out to the pupils that just like the stories of the ballads, not all modern poetry celebrates the fine and the beautiful. She was a soul in despair. Her last words about leaving the world from Welfare Island are plain and blunt. Who are her "comrades of silence"? What does she mean "forgotten but unshaken"? Why does she say it is her farewell to the world? Did she know she was going to die?

Material like this is not for the fainthearted. Remedial children in my class will recognize a human condition which they commonly see. In the inner city very little of the more harsh aspects of broken lives is spared to anyone, certainly not children who are spectators on its many faces from early childhood.

The material for these final lessons of the year in poetry will deal with just such subject matter. This poem does not have a rhyming pattern, but when the student carefully reads these lines he will be aware of how carefully the words were chosen. If some dark part of human nature is brought out into the open for poetic discussion, then the pupil could draw from his imaginative life a composition of rhymed or unrhymed poetry on a similar subject. It is an area for caution.

In "Cancion Amarga", ("Bitter Song"), the thrust of the discussion will center on how de Burgos chooses her language and the devices she creates to make these images live.

Vocabulary "Bitter Song": agony, caress, peerless, tragedy, existence, emblem, exhausts, soul. There is no rhyming pattern, but each stanza has four lines. Questions. Whose bitter song is this? Why does the poet call the poem a song? In the last stanza she says, "only singing wakes me up". What from? The student will be asked to write a line which is sad, to think of something which moves him and compare that feeling to something else which brings a clear picture to mind. Then he'll be asked to develop a second line and see if it can be disciplined to a rhymed couplet. If this is not possible, he will check the meter of the first line and try to compose a second line with the same meter.

In "Dadme Mi Numero", ("Give Me My Number"), who is saying these words? How could this person's feelings be described? What words are strong enough? What does it mean, "I am ready for the jump?" What does "dead dreams of innocence" mean? Look at the third stanza. What does this language bring to mind? Has anyone noticed that her poetry does not always begin a line with a capital letter? Is punctuation in a poem important? Why? What words did the student have to look up before understanding parts of this poem?

In "Rio Grande de Loiza", ("Big River of Loiza"), only the first half is included. It seems to be autobiographical

and the translation has been done through the poet's adolescence.

Does the poet compare the river to something else? What do you think the river means to this poet? Can you think of anything, for example, the sky, or the stars, or years, which you can compare to something important in your own life?

This is a longer poem which does not seem to have an easy story to read. How old do you think the poet is in this poem? What in the poem makes you think what you do about the poet's age. Can you imagine what you'll be like when you are old? If you can't imagine that, can you imagine what your mother or father were like when they were very little? Write four lines, rhymed or not, about them or yourself and compare your choice with something big and impressive. Let your lines show by the language you choose how you feel about this part of your life.

The unit is complete. The pupils have folders filled with good poetry. The selection of ballads and the poems of Dickinson, Brooks, and de Burgos have introduced the students to an historical perspective of poetry and language. In their readings and analysis they should have developed an adequate grasp of the details of poetic composition and a sensitivity to its special conversation. In addition all have tried their own hand at rhythmic composition. The poems and their own written attempts could possibly be a basic stock of ideas to develop later. Besides these all pupils have learned the ground rules for well-mannered discussion. It is hoped they will demonstrate an added depth in comprehension. All in all they have become acquainted with the art of poetry, written or recited.

Annotated Teacher Bibliography

Brooks, Gwendolyn. *Maud Martha* . New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953.

This book, her only novel, written in poetic prose, traces a typical Black girl's life from childhood to maturity.

Brooks, Gwendolyn. *Bronzeville Boys and Girls* . New York: Harper & Row, 1956.

This book of poetry is intended for children. Each poem is named for a child. The poems celebrate people, ideas, and events which to a child are filled with wonder.

Colón, Emilio M., editor. *Julia de Burgos Antolog'a Poética* . Mexico: 1968.

This second edition of Julia de Burgos' poetry is printed in Spanish by her friend, Emilio M. Colon, of Ediciones Roringuen Editor'al Cogquó. It is a volume that contains her one poem written in English.

Erkkila, Betsy. "Emily Dickinson on Her Own Terms", *The Wilson Quarterly* , Spring, 1985, pp.98-109. This article characterizes Dickinson's love as her devotion to poetry.

Koch, Kenneth and Farrell, Kate. *Sleeping on the Wing* . New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1982. This is an anthology of modern poetry with essays on reading and writing. The comments and selections were prepared by master teachers and are excellent for those teachers who need guidance in teaching poetry.

Leach, MacEdward, editor. *The Ballad Book* . New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955.

This is a fine collection of ballads. It contains a wealth of material from England and Scotland and the United States. There are many ballads about Robin Hood.

Scholes, Robert. *Elements of Poetry* . New York, London, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1969.

A small and excellent paperbound book which helps a student or a teacher to read poetry. It is packed with valuable information about all kinds of poetic devices and writing patterns with a significant poem to analyze for most.

Spaulding, Henry, editor. *The Encyclopedia of Black Folklore* . New York: Jonathan David Publisher, Middle Village, N.Y. 11379, 1978.

This is a revised edition. It is a very funny collection of stories, poems, songs, and recipes.

Spiller, Thorp, Johnson, and Canby, editors. *Literary History of the United States* . New York: The MacMillan Company, 1948.

This is an old and excellent literary history of prose and poetry. The article “Experiments in Poetry: Sidney Lanier and Emily Dickinson” is taken from the second volume.

Todd, Mabel Loomis, and Higginson, T.W., editors. *Collected Poems of Emily Dickinson* . New York: Chatham River Press, 1983.

This is an ornamental edition of Emily Dickinson’s poetry which contains titles and punctuation not in her original manuscripts.

Untermeyer, Louis, editor. *The Golden Treasury of Poetry* . New York: Western Publishing Company, Inc., Golden Press, 1959.

There is a complete set of poetry in the teacher’s materials resource packet which is in the Yale-New Haven Teachers’ Institute Library. All of the poems mentioned in this unit are there and in addition there is a large supply if a teacher wants to make his or her own selection.

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