



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

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

Guide for Curriculum Unit 85.01.08
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This unit is intended to introduce poetry reading and writing to remedial 7th and 8th graders. Each lesson includes oral reading and discussion plus time and help with creative writing. The selection of poetry is drawn from ballads about Robin Hood, "Sir Peter's Leman", "Sweet William", "Barbara Allen", (four versions), "Frankie and Johnnie", and "Stagolee". It also has poetry from Emily Dickinson, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Julia de Burgos. The concentration in Dickinson's poetry is on her nature poems. Brief lesson plans for "Summer Shower", "The Sea of Sunset", "A Day", "The Pedigree of Honey", "There's a certain slant of light", "Indian Summer" and "November" are incorporated. There is a large body of her nature poetry in the teacher's materials resource package for teachers to use if they would prefer to make their own selection. The poetry of Gwendolyn Brooks comes from her book of children's poetry, titled "Bronzeville Boys and Girls." In addition there are excerpts in the package from her novel, "Maud Martha." There are four poems of Julia de Burgos. The Spanish original is provided along with an English translation. Her poems are "Farewell in Welfare Island" (in English), an "Give Me My Number," "Bitter Song", and "Big River of Loiza" (translations).

An attempt has been made in this unit to show how time has affected poetry. The language of the early ballads demonstrates that there are historical differences in the words as well as the changes that occur when a story moves from one country to another or moves within a country. The three women poets span a little more than a hundred years. They also come from a broad spectrum of ethnic backgrounds. The common denominator of their work is that they sing of similar things, that which is close to home, nature, sorrow, and death.

The idea which binds this together is that, while poetry is a private language, it is intended to be shared. Good poems do not confine themselves to a narrow view but point at what is commonly shared, that which is entertaining, and what moves us all.

(Recommended for remedial English or Reading classes, grades 7 and 8)

Key Words

Poetry Writing Instruction

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