



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1989 Volume II: Poetry

A Journey of Poetry

Curriculum Unit 89.02.01
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If we love poetry, we will read it and re-read it, think about it often, and browse in books of poetry; our attention will “fill out and make radiant this life of ours.” At first, students may react to poetry with the same enthusiasm with which they approach weekly tests, but soon they will come around. Some students have much trouble pronouncing or decoding the vocabulary or imagery, but that obstacle can be overcome too, if poetry isn’t taught too indifferently. It is very important to impress upon students that in order to read poetry well, they should look up meanings of any words they don’t know. Also, whenever a poem is assigned for reading, it is helpful to write on the board the meanings of any seemingly unfamiliar words; the connotations of a word may be suggested too. Furthermore, students sometimes don’t enjoy poetry because they don’t feel comfortable reading it. Therefore, one should give them a great deal of practice reading intensively and looking carefully at each poem. On the other hand, poems should not be over explained by the teacher. A teacher can suggest interpretations for the poem, but encourage even more explications by the students.

The teacher should be a reader of poetry herself and teach only those poems which she enjoys and appreciates while all the time developing and improving her own and her students’ taste. Poems selected should be well-written, of good quality, and appealing to the level of the students. For example, “When the Frost Is on the Punkin,” by James Whitcomb Riley, is probably too simple for secondary school pupils, but “The Wasteland,” by T.S. Eliot is probably too difficult.

The poetry curriculum will take approximately one month of the ten-month segment of the creative and expository writing course. Or, in a general approach, one could sprinkle in some poetry higgledy-piggledy with drama, short story, novel, or essay units. This unit should be suitable for all levels of ability in the tenth and eleventh grades.

The journey will be a representative sampling of mostly American poetry, including the major poets of the past, such as Whitman, Dickinson, Frost, Robinson, Cummings, and Hughes as well as modern poets including May Swenson, Mary Oliver, Charles Simic, John Haines, Stanley Kunitz, Robert Lowell, Mark Strand, Louis Simpson, Beatrice Janosco, William Stafford, Lou Lipsitz, Gwendolyn Brooks, Lillian Morrison, Robert Wallace, and John Ashberry. One of the most important purposes of the unit will be to make poetry rewarding to read and discuss. Moreover, the unit will help stimulate the flow of creative juices by having students create original poems which express their own life experiences and are engaging to read. The journey through the field of poetry will be intense and deep. Thus, the poetry readers and writers in the class will be changed forever in the way they appreciate and judge poetry.

My objectives for the unit are for students to:

1. become familiar with a variety of poems, contemporary, traditional, and experimental.
2. have practice comparing and contrasting two poems about the same subject.
3. be able to read a poem closely and interpret it in terms of meaning, imagery, and sound; then write an analysis of it.
4. discover their own reality and their own voice through poetry.
5. create original poems which express their own life experiences and are engaging to read.
6. prepare a portfolio of their best poetry—revised, rewritten, polished, and titled.
7. sharpen their powers of observation.
8. improve their taste in poetry.

I will kick off the poetry unit by using the immersion approach reading humorous, witty material such as “In Just,” by E.E. Cummings, and “Jabberwocky,” by Lewis Carroll, along with some of my own poems (my muse does flow occasionally). I will spend a little time at first discussing the following questions:

What is the value of poetry?

What is special about poetry?

Why do poets write poems?

How can I write poems to express thoughts, feelings, and observations?

When I ask, “What is the value of poetry?” I will list various answers on the board, such as: Poetry makes use of the imagination and creativity. Poetry gives human meaning to the bare facts. Poetry helps one to enter imaginatively into a larger world. A great deal of information can be suggested by one sparse poetic phrase. Poetry, serious in content, may consider the basic questions of philosophy, psychology, theology, and history. Students can discuss each point.

Pupils will have the opportunity to bring to class favorite poems (on records or tapes) to share in a listening session and then tell why they like them. Then students can pore through a smorgasbord of poetry books in the classroom, including many fresh, contemporary poetry books which speak to young people—about love, hate, nature, animals, athletes and cars. We will read, study, and discuss them. Students may spend some time making poetry posters for homework illustrating favorite poems while I put up poetry and poets’ pictures making classroom displays of poems and art. I will cover the blackboard with a variety of humorous poems, parodies, traditional and modern verse, and varied shapes of poems. I hope students will relate some of the

poems to their own experiences. Moreover, I will try to emphasize that their grades will be based on their commitment to the poetry reading and writing assignments, not their degree of talent.

Perhaps the Japanese proverb: “Don’t study an art, practice it,” and “Example is a globe of precepts,” (by Sir Francis Bacon), might be the guiding precepts for the poetry unit. ¹ However, there are many ways of introducing the class to poetry. One way may be to bring to class the lyrics of some of the songs that are popular with young people and put these lyrics on the board to discuss and analyze. Or, as I’ve already explained, each student can bring a favorite poem to class, give it a good reading, by practicing first, and tell why it is her favorite.

Another way to introduce the poetry unit might be to improvise a poem on the board by having the students choose a topic, brainstorm vivid images and use the same structure as a professional poets’ to model, as I mention further on in the lesson plans. The ways to introduce poetry are numerous. Yet, perhaps they delay the genuine study of poetry. It is probably best to begin with the first poem, in an enthusiastic way showing the students that you enjoy and appreciate the value of poetry.

Some Guidelines for Teaching Poetry

Steven Dunning in *Teaching Literature to Adolescents: Poetry* has given some helpful guidelines for teaching poems which can be modified and adapted for different levels and classes.

1. A teacher should teach only those poems which she admires or really likes. ² One’s enthusiasm for a certain poem is contagious and pupils enjoy a good, lively presentation. The poetry curriculum should become a reflection of the teacher’s taste: yet she should take into consideration students’ interests too. A teacher can read widely in literary magazines, contemporary books of poetry, poetry anthologies and English journals becoming more catholic in her tastes. Moreover, encouraging students to browse in poetry books, bringing to class poetry recordings and videos from the American Master’s series on public television, and inviting a local or visiting poet into the classroom—all will help to stimulate and excite students.
2. The poetry teacher should keep the discussion of the poem itself as the main focus of the lesson and not wander far afield. A good question to ask when starting to explore a poem might be: What are the images and ideas in this poem and how do they interrelate? (Dunning, p. 55) A good poem for helping students to become aware of how poets use pictures to express abstract ideas is “Ars Poetica” by Archibald Mac Leish, which discusses the “picture-making” practice that is essential to poetry and thought. The poet images an experience that moves her in some way—it may fill her with wonder, anger, frustration, etc. The reader’s imagination gives her the power to form pictures in her mind triggered by words that appeal to the senses. The concrete words that the poet chooses trigger the reader’s imagination creating a series of images in the reader’s mind, forming a picture much like the poet’s experience. John Ciardi explains in chapter six of *How Does a Poem Mean?* pp. 238-244) that people think in sight and picture making metaphors conveying complex thoughts and meanings. He uses lines 19-20 of “Ars Poetica” for an example of this visual practice: (“Ars Poetica” is included in a packet of poems at the Institute office.)

For all the history of grief
An empty doorway and a maple leaf.

Ask students: How are an empty doorway and a maple leaf “equal to” grief and how are leaning grasses and two lights above the sea “equal to” love? The feeling of grief is equivalent to the sight of “an empty doorway and a (fallen?) maple leaf.” A picture expressing a complex thought is basic to poetry and Ciardi further points out that the picture gives a complete range of meaning that one can’t express in words. The power of sense imagery to express meaning that can’t be expressed in prose is what Mac Leish is expressing in “Ars Poetica,” as well as the idea that a poem should show, not tell its thoughts.

Sometimes a poet may speak with other voices than his own. If we look closely at the speaker of a poem, we find that there may be another speaker whom the poet has imagined similar to the way an actor speaks a part written by the playwright. (Dunning, p. 24) In other words, the speaker, the “I” is sometimes the poet, but not always. For example, in Langston Hughes’ poem, “Without Benefit of Declaration,” the speaker is probably the brother of the young man leaving home to go off to war. In the first stanzas, the brother speaks to the young man, Joe. Then toward the end, he speaks to his mother. Since Joe suggests all soldiers, the poem extends to all families whose sons have gone to war.

The following ideas about poetry can be taught though: Poems can be about any subject for different purposes and in different forms. A poem may have a little different meaning for each person who reads it, but there is also much in it that has a definite meaning. Some poems rhyme, but some don’t; poems use words clearly and sharply and poems have rhythm. Therefore, in teaching poetry, we should let the poem speak in its own voice.

3. The mechanics of poetry should be taught by reasoning from the particular to the general. In other words, the concluding of generalizations about poetry should come after many experiences with examples that help form the generalizations. Learning happens most effectively in context. Labels, definitions of terms, concepts and poetic techniques are best learned when they are related to a particular poem. For example: “Southern Mansions” by Anna Bontemps is good poem to use for teaching about stereotypic images. Irony can be effectively taught in “Mending Wall” by Robert Frost. Personification and figurative language can be considered in “Fifteen” by William Stafford.

A good illustration of who the speaker is in a poem can be found in Henry Reed’s war poem, “Naming of Parts.” What can be considered for teaching is that there is more than one voice speaking in the poem. Ask the students:

What seems to be happening in this poem?

What are the parts of?

Where is the lesson taking place?

Who are the people in the poem?

Who is talking?

How many voices are there?

Where does the second voice begin talking?

What pronouns lead you to believe that there is more than one speaker?

What are the two speakers like?

How do the two speakers differ? (Dunning, p. 23)

4. Poems should not be overly explained. (Dunning, p. 23) Probably the best way to read poems is to hand one out, read it aloud once, and then have the students read it aloud with you telling them that each reading helps to make the meaning clearer until they have the sense of insight that repeated readings offer. I would make students aware of some poetic elements especially as they contribute to revealing the meaning, but sometimes that will be of no use at all. Sometimes a too persistent analysis of a poem may not be useful either. Eventually students should develop to the stage where they want to read or recite poems to the rest of the class.

Help students respond more sensitively to the poems they are reading by encouraging them to express their own ideas about different meanings; then discuss possible interpretations. Support all thoughtful conclusions and only correct ignorant or biased interpretations. Questions and comments such as “What might this mean?” “For what reasons did the poet...?” or “I don’t think you can justify that from the poem.” Encourage students to become more involved and think more deeply. (Dunning, p. 23)

Kenneth Koch and Kate Farrell in *Sleeping on the Wing* also suggest that poetry readers shouldn’t analyze each word of the poem until they have an impression of the whole poem.

This seems scholarly and scientific but is as misleading as analyzing each of a person’s word in a conversation before you know who he is and what he is talking about. Better than starting right in to analyze according to some already existing idea is to think of your own responses to it. Also, when first reading a poem, you don’t have to be concerned with its technique, with how it is made—that is to say, its rhyme, its meter, its imagery, and so on. ³

5. Students occasionally should have a chance to choose the poetry that they will read, discuss, study and write about. (Dunning, p. 27) One assignment that uses this recommendation is as follows:

Pick any poem from any poetry book or from the photocopied sheets I have distributed of at least thirteen lines in length, and memorize it for a classroom presentation. Try to choose a poem to which you are attracted, rather than one whose shortness of line seems to suggest an easy process of memorization. A poem

you genuinely like will be far easier (and more rewarding) to memorize and present effectively. In your recitation, try to avoid just rattling off the poem as if it were a shopping list. Memorize the lines well enough, and become familiar with them, so that you can convey a certain closeness to the lines and language. Then lead the class in a discussion of your poem.

Since poetry teaching is at times extremely challenging, it will be easier if students are given many opportunities to search for and bring in poems which are about their own interests and of their own tastes. Even though a poem may be of poor quality, the teacher should compare it to one that is better about the same theme and challenge the students to examine both to see which is the better poem.

The students may choose to read expressively and lead an explication of their own selections. Then the teacher can ask questions to stimulate the student to question his own choice. The teacher has the responsibility though to try to develop and improve the students' taste in poetry by beginning where the students are and progressing from there. With this poetry unit, I hope to move from understanding the meaning of various poems to appreciation and judgements of quality. Questions such as the following will help to develop standards and evaluations of quality:

Does the poem use clichés?

Is the imagery original and creative?

Is the poem giving advice?

Is the poem too sentimental?

Do you feel that the poet's description is an accurate one?

Does the poem achieve vividness, honesty and sincerity?

6. Students during the poetry unit should be asked to write poems. They should experience how challenging it is to get "the right words in the right order." (Dunning, p. 30) Reading poems stimulates and provides the catalyst for writing poems. My students will be asked to write all kinds of original poems. They may need stimuli for inspiration—a musical composition, a current event, a childhood memory, a first line. I will tell them that within the next week or two they will be expected to write two or more original poems and interlace that with regular reminders and suggestions for how to get started which will give them a little more time for their muse to rise. I will suggest to my students to keep a notebook of their dreams, experiences, lyrics of a song, feelings, conversation, impressions, or anything that appeals or troubles them or that they feel deeply about. Robert Wallace has said in the introduction to *Writing Poems* :

Writing poems—trying to handle one's deepest feelings and to present one's most serious views of the world—is always an intimate, vulnerable activity. In a sense all good poems are lucky hits. Beginning poets..., should always consider the poems they present as experiments, valuing those which succeed, letting go of those which do not. One doesn't grade all the papers, only the best. ⁴

One suggestion to stimulate students to write poetry is to get them involved in a daily writing habit that will

help them to catch in words their experiences exactly as they happen. Therefore, they can capture exhilarating or agonizing moments, portray them for a friend, or preserve them to relive later on. What kind of experiences? They could include any complexities or contradictions of some moments or their experience. They can capture their dreams, interesting dialogue heard in public places, contradictory feelings about a certain time or event, surprising and unusual sights (being suddenly confronted by a homeless man who demands a dollar), the voices of birds calling in the morning, a gazebo in a field, a lone, green heron standing in a swamp, impressions of a first or last day in school, a trip to a museum or anything else they want to write a poem about.

Another stimulating activity is to have your students choose a disturbing event in their city or neighborhood—a time when plants or animals were shoved out for the building of a highway, a highrise or a condominium. How did the people involved and the onlookers react? Then ask them to make a list of specific details associated with the event. For example:

Old tenement comes crashing down
A middle-aged woman looks disoriented
Bulldozers and cranes are uprooting live trees and shrubs
Two snakes hurry swimmingly to a clump of rocks
Worms scurry back into their deep tunnels
Ferns and Queen Anne's lace are torn up
Sweat of workers operating machines and hanging around
A dog barks fiercely
A chipmunk scuttles away
The air is dusty and rattles like bones

Another good way to involve students in a poetry exercise is to compile a series of associated thoughts that begin with and end on the same observation: You will progress through free association through a list of thoughts back to the starting line. After completing the circle, arrange your thoughts in the most effective way. For example:

Barbara Bush loves her English Springer
Spaniel mother and puppies.
Exxon Valdez spilled ten million gallons of oil.

Dying sea birds and otters drop to the bottom.
Nancy Reagan's beauty parlor transformed to a dog maternity room.
Will our mixed Spitz and Golden Retriever have ticks on him tonight?
Will Alaska's Prince William Sound be restored?
Can earth be saved?
Will my wounds stop bleeding?
The horse kicked the new puppy
when Beverly died of cancer.
Can the planet be restored to health?
Barbara Bush fondles her English Springer
Spaniel mother and puppies.

Other exercises for stimulating students to express themselves poetically are explained in the five lesson plans included in this unit. A haiku-writing lesson enjoyed by students usually produces some delightful verses. Ballads can be read and students could try writing one about someone who does something heroic. Listing poems, epigrams, letter poems, couplets and riddles all can help students say something poetically. Students can use Rupert Brooke's poem "The Great Lover" as an example for modeling a listing poem about things that they cherish.

Another technique is to encourage students to keep a notebook by their beds to write down their dreams when they wake up. What are the images from the dream? If they can't remember a dream, they could try this: Relax totally, pushing out all conscious thoughts. Let your subconscious work to bring out images. For example, imagine that you are in a strange city and describe what you see, hear, taste and feel. Clear your mind of all conscious thoughts and let the images come from your unconscious mind.

The conclusion to helping students enjoy and appreciate poetry lies in doing many activities with it.

Teachers and class can read aloud, dramatize, present oral readings of, sing, discuss, compare, write about, imitate, illustrate with words, illustrate with pictures, listen to recordings of, laugh about, memorize, collect favorite poems or passages and with modern poetry, serve as co-creator. ⁵

I hope that my students will evoke profound epiphanies from our poetry tour and will feel greater appreciation for poetry than they have ever felt before.

Some Good Candidates for Classroom Teaching:

(All subsequent poems are in a folder in the Institute office.)

“Eating Poetry” by Mark Strand

Presenting the poem:

Imagine that you are in a library around closing time and you see a wild, curly-haired man surrounded with many opened poetry books and he is voraciously reading one. Ask students: What kind of person is he? What is he/she thinking about? What does the title suggest? Is this title a metaphor or a simile? Look again at the first three lines. Who is the speaker in the poem? Why does the speaker want to join the dogs? What does reading poetry do to the speaker’s imagination? How does the librarian react? The speaker in the poem is not always the poet. Who else could the speaker be? Do you think the poet ever really read in the library and saw dogs run up the stairs? How does the last stanza say that “eating” poetry can affect a person?

“Without Benefit of Declaration” by Langston Hughes

Presenting the poem:

Use this poem as a companion piece to “The Heroes” by Louis Simpson, or to any of the following:

“Strange Meeting” by Wilfred Owen

“Dulce Et Decorum Est” by Wilfred Owen

“Come Up from the Fields Father” by Walt Whitman

Langston Hughes views the terrible power of war and its wastefulness through the single speaker and the man to whom he speaks, Joe and his mother. He uses persuasive dialogue and notable metal-medal imagery. The soldiers went to a war which was not formally declared.

Did he know why he went or what the war was fought for?

Who is the speaker of the poem?

How is wind like steel?

How can snow be like lead?

Why does the speaker say, “Don’t ask me why.” Joe should go to war?

What is the tone of the poem?

Does the poem address one family or all families involved in war?

What meaning does “hidden from the sky” evoke? (line 14)

How does the understatement used in line 15 make it ironic?

How should and (with what tone) the last line be read?

“Come Up From the Fields Father” by Walt Whitman

Presenting the poem:

Many poems express a negative attitude toward war from the time of Christ to now.

Ask the students:

How have the methods of fighting wars changed?

How have the effects of fighting wars changed?

How has a person’s role in fighting a war changed? ⁵

This poem takes place during the Civil War when the author volunteered to serve as an army nurse in Washington D.C. and in Virginia from 1862-1865. This is a letter to an Ohio farm family. The speaker could probably be any person who is against war. The speaker sees no reason for war, only the futility and certainty of death. The poem is in free verse and possesses no formal meter. (Free verse is poetry which has no end rhyme, no fixed metrical pattern, but does have rhythm and irregular length of lines.)

What do each of the following words mean: jam, moderate, ominous, skirmish, stricken, tarry, teeming, transparent and vital?

Compare and contrast “Come Up From the Fields Father” with “The Heroes” by Louis Simpson, or “Without Benefit of Declaration” by Langston Hughes, or “Dulce Et Decorum Est” and “Strange Meeting,” both by Wilfred Owen.

“The Heroes” by Louis Simpson

Presenting the poem:

A general is committing his troops to a “patriotic and picturesque” battle spot. What are the different meanings that committed has?

Are the “rapscallions” responsible for their role in the war?

This poem uses several words and images that stimulate the reader’s imagination: “just enough of their charms shot away to make them more handsome;” “ascending the gang-planks;” “new bibles and marksmen’s medallions.”

What does each make you see?

What does each remind you of?

Before assigning students to do a choral reading of “The Heroes,” decide by class discussion what feeling or mood each reader should try to express for each stanza. Have the class look carefully at each phrase or

sentence to understand the words which vividly suggest the poet's mood in that sentence. The last sentence should be read seriously; the first three almost "comically ironic."

"Fear" by J. Paco D'Arcos

Presenting the poem:

The term fear affects people in many ways. Read a newspaper article and then write a poem which would cause you the greatest fear. You must imagine yourself in the time and place of the article. Ask three students to prepare a choral reading of "Fear" by J. Paco D'Arcos using the appropriate tone for each stanza.

Ask the students:

What are the various things which the speaker of the poem is not afraid of?

How does the poet react to the approaching evening?

Include in your answer the poet's phrases.

What is the main theme of the poem?

Who is the "you" in the last stanza?

Assignment: Try to unlock your feelings, the unconscious and the irrational as a source for a poem. Describe what you fear. Use the technique of clustering to begin your writing. Gabriele Luser Rico recommends the following directions:

1. Start with a word stimulus such as "fear" in an oval in the middle of the page of the paper. Write down in their own ovals any images, connections, impressions or phrases that you associate with the word "fear." Connect with lines the word and ideas that seem related. Draw arrows to show direction. Don't worry about the chaos. Just remember that it is the first step in the "creative process." (Rico, p. 37)
2. Continue writing the impressions, images, ideas and associations stimulated by the word "fear" for ten minutes while being totally involved with the process until you have a focus for what you want to write about. Your mind might then say, "Aha! I think I know what I want to say." (Rico, p. 37)
3. Look over the impressions and associations in the cluster to see if one of them might start you writing your first sentences and give you a main focus. (Rico, p. 37)
4. Use only what appears to be related to your "pattern of meaning" to describe what you fear. (Rico, p. 37)
5. Once you have written your poem bring your writing to a close "by looking at your beginning and hooking your ending into the beginning by repeating a word, phrase, a dominant thought, or an emotion that was also present in your opening line..." (Rico, p. 38)
6. Read over the poem carefully and critically. Revise and improve the poem. After you have revised your poem, read it aloud to your peers in a workshop and ask them to criticize it honestly. What is effective? What could be improved? What is vivid, precise and memorable? Tough, honest readers and listeners help one to perfect one's writing. The following is an example of my poem about fear.

Apoqee of Fear

35,000 feet above sea level
flying in the gray storm.
Bludgeons of lightning strike
the nose of the jet.
I grip the back of my seat.
Sweat collects under me.
Flash of lightning explodes...
Oxygen masks drop from their cabinets.
No word from the pilot.
Heavy stillness of the passengers.
Transparent faces of the stewardesses.

SUMMARY

Guidelines for Experiencing a Poem:

In an approximate way, the following questions and directions could be used with almost any poem:

1. Paraphrase the poem; that is, summarize the poem by considering what is happening in the poem. Think about the nature of the speaker, what he is saying, and the poem's setting.
2. What sort of words does the poet use? Do these words have particular connotations for you? In general, what can you say about the poem's diction?
3. What is the shape of the poem on the paper? Does the poem have a rigid stanza form, or is it free verse? Is the poem neatly organized, or is it spread out on the page? How does the shape of the poem seem to relate to its content or subject?
4. Consider the poet's use of particular stylistic devices, especially those pertaining to sound. Can you find examples of alliteration, assonance, rhyme, a noticeable rhythm, or onomatopoeia? What effect do these have on your reading of the poem?

5. Take particular note of the poem’s imagery, for the poet communicates most closely with the reader through his/her images. What sort of images are present? Watch for specific visual (sight), aural (sound), tactile (touch), taste, and nasal (smell) images. What sort of physical perceptions do these images give to the poem?
6. What sort of comparisons does the poet make through the use of figurative language (especially through similes and metaphors)? How do these comparisons expand the range and meaning of the poem?
7. Consider the poem’s tone. How does the poem make you feel? How do the stylistic devices (#4) and the use of imagery (#5) and figurative language (#6) contribute to this feeling or mood? What is the prevailing mood—calm, excited, happy, sad, ironic, sarcastic? Try to tell me just how you feel.
8. Search for an inner tension, a conflict, in the poem. Most poems make use of some sort of inner tension to provide a basis for developing the theme or main idea. In this regard, watch especially for irony.
9. Ask yourself, “Why has the poet written this poem?” What is the main idea that the poet is trying to get across? How do you respond to this theme? Has the poem shown you something new?

Try to understand that these questions are all interrelated, that we can not talk about sound devices without talking about tone, that we can’t discuss conflict without touching upon theme. Poetry consists of all of these particulars unified into a cohesive whole.

FIRST LESSON PLAN

In-class exercise:

Using one of the titles below from Charles Simic or Thomas Lux (as both your title and your first line), follow the form of Charles Simic’s poems by:

1. having some of your poetry grow from the use of enjambment (non-end-stopped lines).
2. having the poem develop as a sort of “muse” or free association on the topic announced originally, seeming to follow the free association pattern of your mind.
3. having the length be approximately 20-24 lines without stanza breaks.

Titles:

“THERE WERE SOME SUMMERS”

“IT’S THE LITTLE TOWNS I LIKE”

“HIS JOB IS HONEST AND SIMPLE”

“YOU GO TO SCHOOL TO LEARN”

“IF YOU’RE GOING TO SELL YOUR SOUL TO THE DEVIL”

“...ASK ON THE SECOND FLOOR OF THE HOUSE WITH THE DOGS”

“GO INSIDE A STONE”

“A BIRD CALLS ME”

“WE WERE SO POOR”

“THE WORLD DOESN’T END”

At home, either polish this one (written in class) or write one with a different first line.

SECOND LESSON PLAN: Childhood Memories

Modeling, a prewriting technique helps students’ imagination, creativity, and writing skill to blossom. Also, it provides a concrete way of teaching and offers rewarding experiences for the students. It is a way of using another author’s work for inspiration and guidelines to launch a similar style of writing. “It’s purpose is to give you a structure, an aesthetic pattern to follow, within which to treat your own discovered content.” (Rico, pp. 44-46) It does not have to be a professional writer’s style, but could be a writing of anyone’s whom you admire. Both clustering and modeling can be used together to create a richer, more concise more evocative, more polished, more rhythmic” piece of writing. (Rico, pp. 44-46)

. . .And even if you were in some
prison the walls of which let none of
the sounds of the world come to your
senses—would you not then still
have your childhood, that treasure-
house of memories? Turn your

attention thither. Try to raise the
submerged sensations of that ample
past: your personality will grow
more firm, your solitude will widen
and will become a dusky dwelling
past which the noise of others goes
by far away. ⁶

The following poetry assignment makes use of the clustering and modeling techniques. Write a poem about a childhood memory. Use specific imagery—feelings, sights, sounds, smells, touches and taste. Try to become totally immersed. Use a dominant impression for your kernel word and radiate other memories and associations out from that center. Write in a voice of a child or in the voice of memory of an adult (or both), but try to give attention to what a child would observe. Read the following poems for inspiration:

“The Centaur” by May Swenson

“Rough” by Stephen Spender

“Sketch From Loss of Memory” by Sonya Dorman

“Reflections on a Gift of Watermelon Pickle Received from a Friend Called Felicity” by John Tobias

“My Lost Youth” by Henry Wordsworth Longfellow

“There was a Child Went Forth” by Walt Whitman

“The Horse Chestnut Tree” by Richard Eberhart

“The Ballad of the Light-Eyed Little Girl” by Gwendolyn Brooks

THIRD LESSON PLAN

Poetry is nonsense that makes sense. What does that mean? Read the following poem, "Barter," and consider the questions that follow to begin to find out.

BARTER by Sara Teasdale

Life has loveliness to sell,
All beautiful; and splendid things,
Blue waves whitened on a cliff,
Soaring fire that sways and sings,
And children's faces looking up,
Holding wonder like a cup.
Life has loveliness to sell,
Music like a curve of gold,
Scent of pine trees in the rain,
Eyes that love you, arms that hold
And for your spirit's still delight,
Holy thoughts that star the night.
Spend all you have for loveliness,
Buy it and never count the cost;
For one white singing hour of peace
Count many a year of strife well lost,
And for a breath of ecstasy
Give all you have been, or could be.

1. What do the following words mean: barter, soaring, strife, and ecstasy?
2. This poem both tells and shows. Which lines show and which lines tell? Point out words that help to communicate by their sound?
3. In what way might we say that the first line is nonsense? Do we usually speak of life as being able to see things?
4. Look at the third line of the last stanza. Do the two adjectives describing hour make sense literally?
5. In what lines is the meaning of the poem best expressed?
6. Many readers of the poem find that they remember two lines of the first stanza for a while. Which two lines are these?
7. Barter means “trade.” What is to be traded for what?
8. Look at the first two lines of the last stanza. What else besides money could “spend” and “cost” refer to?
9. All readers of “Barter” react to the poem in terms of their own life experiences. How do you react to it?
10. In the first stanza, the reader is advised to trade everything for a short time of ecstasy. Do you believe there is perfect, complete happiness? Would you exchange “many a year of strife” for “one white singing hour of peace” ?
11. Do some research and find out how Sara Teasdale’s life differed from the life told in many of her poems.

FOURTH LESSON PLAN: Japanese Haiku

Some of the following are translations of a type of Japanese poem called haiku. The word haiku means nature. They help us to appreciate the ordinary things of life in a fresh way or new relationship. In Japanese, the haiku contains exactly seventeen syllables. What does the poet see and emphasize in each scene? A haiku focuses on one scene or one single impression which allows us to think about it. Often it may create a mood or a feeling. Many of the traditional Japanese haiku are poignant and poetic. The first one is not a traditional haiku.

Even in the Night Seasons

Gentle
Words Spoken
With Happiness
In Pleasant Places
Make Bright The
Darkest Season,
O Friend.

From *Jade Bough, White Shadows* by Sue McConkey

Above the Dock
Above the quiet dock in midnight,
Tangle in the tall mast's corded height,
Hangs the moon. What seemed so far away
Is but a child's balloon, forgotten after play.

—T.E. Hulme

Stubble
It has rained enough
To turn the stubble in the field
Black.

—Basha

Butterflies
Fallen petals rise
back to the branch-I watch:
oh . . . butterflies!

—Moritake

Hail
In the abandoned boat
The hail
Bounces about

—Shiki

Umbrella
As I walk in the winter rain,
The umbrella
Pushes me back.

—Shisei-jo

1. The first haiku “Even in the Night Seasons” describes the qualities of a friend and how that friend lightens the darkness.
2. The second haiku, “Stubble,” the poet arranged the words for emphasis placing black alone in the last line. It shows the effect of much rain in a field.
3. The third haiku, “Butterflies,” makes us vividly see the beauty of the butterflies. The order of events ending with “oh...butterflies!” actually recreates the actual experience of the poet. Certain qualities in common between butterflies and petals justify the exaggeration.
4. The fourth haiku makes us see the moon as a child’s balloon and feel the entanglement of the balloon in the mast of the ship.
5. The fifth haiku makes us feel the curved shape of the boats interior and we feel the coldness and the ricocheting of the hail bouncing about.
6. In the sixth haiku, the poet makes us feel the way the person is holding the umbrella.

Assignment:

1. Write a Japanese haiku, a three-lined poem that is divided into lines with five syllables in the first line; seven in the second line and five in the third line. For example:
Chick-a-dee flitting,
Murmuring from the hemlock
Picking red berries.
2. Before you try to have students write their own haiku, emphasize to them the importance of using concrete images. Point out that each of the haiku examples shows a clear, vivid image.
3. Write another modern haiku about something poetic or awe-inspiring, or on the other hand, about a negative aspect of contemporary life.

Notes

1. John Fairfax and John Moat, *The Way to Write* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), Foreword by Ted Hughes, p. 1.
2. Stephen Dunning, *Teaching Literature to Adolescents: Poetry* (Glenview, Illinois: Scott Foresman and Co., 1966), p. 12. All subsequent page references to this text appear in parentheses and are prefaced by the author's name, Dunning.
3. Kenneth Koch and Kate Farrell, *Sleeping on the Wing* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), p. 10. All subsequent references to this book are prefaced by first author's name, Koch.
4. Robert Wallace, *Writing Poems* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2nd edition, 1987), p. x.
5. J.N. Hook, *The Teaching of High School English* (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1965), p. 200.
6. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet* (New York City: W.W. Norton and Company, 1934), p. 20.

Student and Teacher Bibliography

Most of all the following books were used in doing research in writing this unit. They are good reference and classroom books for both the teacher and the students. Books especially relevant for students are marked with an asterisk (*).

*Angelou, Maya. *Maya Angelou: Poems* . New York: Bantam Books, 1986. A complete collection of all of Angelou's poems for students to become familiar with. These poems can be used for inspiration and modeling, and to help students unlock their feelings.

Bennett, Robert, Andrew J. Porter, Jr. and Henry L. Terrie, Jr. *American Literature* . Lexington, MA: Ginn and Co., 1981. Very good selection of contemporary poetry.

Boynton, Robert and Maynard Mack. *Introduction to the Poem* . New York: Hayden Book Co., 1969.

Ciardi, John and Miller Williams. *How Does a Poem Mean?* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2nd edition, 1975.

*Dillard, Annie. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* . New York: Harper and Row, 1974. This is a journal of Dillard's explorations over one year in the Roanoke Valley of Virginia. A good model for students to try to imitate.

*Donnelly, Susan. *Eve Names the Animals* . Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1985. An inspiring poetry

book. The 1984 Morse Poetry Prize winner provides inspiration for students to write their own poetry.

Dunning, Stephen. *Teaching Literature to Adolescents* . Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1966. This book is very valuable in discussing poetic techniques and commenting on various poems.

Guth, Hans P. and Patricia Strandness Shnider . *Our World Today* . Massachusetts: D.C. Heath Co., 1981. This book contains a good selection of poetry for this unit.

Hook, J.N. *The Teaching of High School English* . New York: Ronal Press Co., 1965, 3rd edition.

Koch, Kenneth and Kate Farrell. *Sleeping on the wing* . New York: Vintage Books, 1982. A valuable book that contains comments on many poems and then readers are inspired to write their own poetry.

Norton, James H. and Francis Gretton. *Writing Incredibly Short Plays, Poems, Stories* . New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972.

*Oliver, Mary. *American Primitive* . Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1983. Winner of the 1984 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, this book provides a professional's poetry for modeling inspiration.

*Rico, Gabriele Lusser. *Writing the Natural Way* . Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, Inc., 1983. A most valuable book designed to inspire writers to use both hemispheres of the brain to achieve "natural writing." Rico describes and explains the "brainstorming process of clustering" as an effective approach to writing.

*Rilke, Rainer Marie. *Letters to a Young Poet* . New York: W.W. Norton Co., 1954.

*Scholes, Robert. *Elements of Poetry* . New York: Oxford University Press, 1969. A valuable book for discussing poetic techniques and commenting on various poems.

*Swenson, May. *Half Sun Half Sleep : New Poems* . New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967. A professional poet's book of wonderful poems for modeling inspiration.

Wallace, Robert. *Writing Poems* . Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 2nd edition, 1987. This book contains some stimulating techniques to help students write poetry.

*Walker, Alice. *Good Night, Willie Lee, I'll See You in the Morning* . New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979. A book of poetry by the Pulitzer Prize-Winning author, for students to use for modeling inspiration.

*Williams, Miller. *Contemporary Poetry in America* . New York: Random House, 1973. An anthology of poetry from "poets born in the twentieth century and who earned their full reputation after the beginning of World War II."

Classroom Materials

VIDEOS

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner . Coleridge's classic poem narrated by Sir Michael Redgrave by Guidance Associates, Communications Park, Box 1000, Mount Kisco, NY, 10549-0010.

E.E. Cummings: The Making of a Poet . Films for the Humanities, P.O. Box 378, Princeton, N.J., 08540, (24 minutes, color).

The Poetry of Rock: A Reflection of Human Values . This video discusses the expressions of freedom, love and self-discovery found in rock lyrics by Guidance Associates. (See above address.)

FILMSTRIPS

Understanding and Appreciating Poetry . Educational Dimensions, P.O. Box 488, Great Neck, NY, 11022.

Poems of Love/Poems of War . Educational Dimensions. Two sound/color filmstrips.

Stopping by the Woods of Mr. Frost . Thomas S. Kilse Co., P.O. Box 3418, Peoria, IL, 61614.

Walt Whitman: An American Original . "The program explores his visions of political democracy, social harmony, and sensual joy in nature..."

Yeats Remembered . A biography of the Irish poet, including him reading his work by Guidance Associates.

We Are Indians: Native American Literature . Oral and written American Indian literature and the contribution they have made to American literature by Guidance Associates.

Poetry . An introduction to poetic techniques, poetic forms and subjects poets have used over the centuries by Guidance Associates.

The Poetic Experience . These filmstrips offer a lyrical introduction to poetic elements, such as word selection, rhythm, form, imagery, meter, simile, metaphor and rhyme by Guidance Associates.

America! The Poetry of a Nation . Includes selections from the work of over twenty of America's most enduring poets.

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