



Poetry for “Special” Students

Curriculum Unit 89.02.05
by Victoria Mallison

“Socially and emotionally maladjusted” (S.E.M.) is a term used to describe students who have emotional/behavioral problems which adversely affect their learning. This unit will be aimed at a group of S.E.M. middle school students residing in an urban setting. These “special” students live in an area with special problems.

Too often we as teachers get so involved in teaching subject matter that we overlook the needs of the student. The basic need of the middle school youngster is to be long, to feel a part of the world he or she lives in.

We can make them feel more a part of our world by showing an understanding and appreciation for the things they believe to be important such as music, television, sex, and even violence and drugs. We may not be able to comfortably address all of these issues, but we may be able to meet them on their level by addressing at least one of the areas.

After we have found a common ground maybe we can really teach our students something. We may not teach everything we dreamed of , nor may we be able to teach the way we dreamed of teaching, but we will be teaching. Isn't teaching what we want to do ? We must be gluttons for punishment.

It requires some creativity to keep the attention of *any* middle school student for more than ten consecutive minutes. The S.E.M. youth like most middle school “ youngins” do have more important things on their minds (ie., sex, drugs, and television). At least they are more important to them.

We as teachers must continuously seek new ways to entice our students to listen what we have to say about reading, writing, and arithmetic. The objectives of this unit are as follows:

1. to enhance the reading curriculum
2. to improve reading and writing skills
3. to teach the appreciation of poetry
4. to serve as a basis for affective education

Many public schools have moved away from poetry in recent years. There is much emphasis on prose yet little on poetry. In past years poetry was given more consideration in the classrooms. Students recited poems after spending days memorizing stanzas. Today a few poems are thrown in between pages of prose in reading textbooks, with a reference here and there to similes and metaphors, and little else.

The ability to speak and write effectively are important assets. A knowledge of poetry can help to acquire these much needed skills, a feeling for poetry influences both writing and speaking. It gives one the desire to put words together descriptively and effectively.

The unit will be implemented at the beginning of October and is expected to be completed by Christmas break. I will use the unit two days a week for two consecutive 45 minute periods to enhance the regular curriculum. The unit will be composed of three sections:

1. Listening to and reading lyrics to Rap, pop, and Gospel music.
2. Reading poetry and using some poems as a basis for affective education.
3. Writing poetry.

Each section will be preceded by related vocabulary. This is necessary because many of the students are reading at about a third grade reading level. I will begin the unit by spending two weeks listening to lyrics to popular music such as Rap (which is very popular with today's youth), Pop, and Gospel.

My reason for introducing poetry by listening to lyrics to songs is simply to say to the students, "hey, you already have an interest in poetry. I now want to expand your knowledge of the subject." The students already enjoy reading rap lyrics to a musical beat; hopefully they will transfer this interest to developing a poem of their own and recite it before their classmates.

"Fresh" Rap personalities are constantly changing but I intend to use the lyrics of Slick Rick. He is popular with the students right now. Cool Moe Dee, and The Fat Boys are other Rap personalities. I will not include them in my unit unless they are suggested by the students. A *Teenage Love* by Slick Rick will be the song I will use to open my unit. The second Rap song will be chosen by the class. Next, we will review the lyrics to a Pop tune by Stevie Wonder, *Village Ghetto Land*. Lastly, during this section, we will listen to and discuss the lyrics of a *Lift Every Voice and Sing* by James Weldon Johnson. The focus of the first section will be to bring to the students, attention to the effect the music has on the lyrics. There will also be some emphasis on the message of the lyrics. I might ask the students if the message changed after hearing the lyrics with the music. Reading the lyrics to a song should give the student an appreciation for how writing begins. Whether one is writing a poem, a story, or a song they each begin with a single thought.

The next section is poetry reading, I will chose poems which are on or about the third grade reading level. There are usually various reading levels in a special education classroom, but the third grade level is comprehended by most students in the middle school. A list of vocabulary words will be reviewed before reading the poems. The list of words will be made up of vocabulary found in the poems to be read during this section.

Here is a list of the poems I will use in this section:

Adams, P. Franklin	The Rich Man
Aldis, Dorothy	Blum
Angelou, Maya	No Loser, No Weeper
	Alone
	Woman Work
	On Aging
Benet, Rosemary	Nancy Hanks
Benet, Rosemary and Abrogam Lincoln	
Stephen Vincent	
Burgess, Gelett	I Wish My Room Had A Floor
Frost, Robert	Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening
Hughes, Langston	Mother to Son
	I, Too
	My People
	Hope
Hughes, Langston	Kid in The Park
	What?
	Gone Boy
	Mama and Daughter
	Ballad of The Landlord
	Harlem
	Freedom's Plow
James, Emmanuel A.	A Small Discovery
Mckuen, Rod	Two
	Me and The Cat
Miller, Mary Britton	Cat
Prelutsky, Jack	The Hippopotamus

The students will be exposed to various types of poems happy, sad, long, short, rhyme, and free style. During this section of the unit students will also be required to memorize poems. Initially the entire class will memorize the same poem, *My People* by Langston Hughes. Each student will recite the poem before the class. Later, the students will be able to chose a poem of their own to recite. After the students recite poems they will be critiqued by their peers. Teacher should model the appropriate way to comment on others work.

There is another aspect of this section, it is the use of some poems to discuss feelings. As you may already know the S.E.M. student usually meets with a social worker or psychologist for approximately half an hour per week. This time is used to discuss alternative ways of dealing with their feelings. The S.E.M. child usually handles frustration, anger, or unhappiness by acting out behaviors like fighting, throwing things, and yelling. Poets address feelings in their work. For instance, in *Harlem* Langston Hughes talks about the frustration of not realizing a dream. I plan to use this poem and others like it to guide my students into talking about their aspiration, goals, dealing with failure, and obstacles. By using poetry the students can feel free to talk about emotions without owning the emotion.

Out of all the poets I have read Langston Hughes' poems depict the situations most identified with by urban youth. Hughes discusses parent/child relationships, drug abuse, religion, loneliness, and many other aspects of city life.

The last section, which I believe will be the most fun, will involve writing poetry. We will spend 4 or 5 weeks on this section. My techniques for teaching poetry have been influenced by Kenneth Koch's book *Wishes, Lies, And Dreams*. I will begin this section by asking students to write a collaborative poem. The next poem will be written individually. They will be asked to write about a particular idea. Kenneth Koch called the idea a "poetry idea". According to Koch "A poetry idea should be easy to understand, it should be immediately interesting, and it should bring something new in the children's poem; this could be new subject matter, new sense of awareness, new experience of language or poetic form." The first poem my students will write individually will be a comparison poem. The students must put a comparison and a sound in every line. Another type of poem the class will write is called a dream poem. I will emphasize that dreams are sometimes hard to make sense of and so their poems do not have to make sense either. The class will be given the opportunity to read their poems aloud one by one. Each student will be (I have about eight students) required to make some constructive comment. There will be time for revisions. The class will be given 2 weeks to write a poem using a "poetry idea" of their choice. The idea can be one that the students create. By the end of this section the students should have completed at least 3 poems.

Lesson Plan II #1

Objective Students will be able to discuss self-esteem and how self-esteem affects our lifestyles.

Materials A copy of the poem *My People* by Langston Hughes for each student.

Procedure The teacher will pass out copies of poem to the class, will ask for a volunteer to read the poem aloud, then read the poem herself to the class, and finally will lead the class into discussion of the poem.

Teacher will include some of the following questions in the discussion:

1. Do you like the poem?
2. What is the poem about?
3. Why does the writer compare his people to the night?
4. What other comparisons does the author make?
5. How does this poem make you feel about his people?
6. What is self-esteem?
7. Do you think the writer likes himself?
8. Do you think that how a person feels about his people affects how he feels about himself?
9. If people have poor images of themselves will they set high goals for themselves?
10. How would a low self-esteem affect what you do in life?

Lesson Plan #2

Objective Students will be able to change the pitch of their voice, stress particular words, and pause after particular words to alter the meaning of a sentence.

Materials a copy of worksheet for each student (teacher made) ;

Procedure The teacher will pass out worksheet to each student, and put students into groups of two. The students will take turns reading the given sentence. The sentence must be read in 3 ways:

1. to make a statement
2. to ask a question
3. show strong feeling

The students will achieve this by changing the pitch of their voice. After this particular exercise the teacher will ask a student from each group to give a demonstration of what they did in the group.

In the next exercise the students will look at a list of sentences. Teacher will instruct the students to stress the underlined word in each sentence, to give the sentence a different meaning.

In the third exercise the teacher will instruct students to read the next sentences and pause at each / mark to give meaning to each sentence. The student must explain the meaning of the sentence they just read. Students should take turns with their partner.

In the last exercise, the teacher will instruct students to read the given sentences in four different ways.

SURPRISE ANGER JOY FEAR

The students will ask their partner to tell which of the above feelings they are trying to show. After each exercise teacher will ask for examples from the groups.

Lesson Plan #3

Objective Students will be able to write one sentence using the words I wish

Materials paper, pencils, blackboard, chalk

Procedure The teacher will inform students that the class will write a poem together and that each child is to contribute one line. The line must contain the words I wish and a color. The teacher will write a model sentence on the board, and will circulate the room to be sure each student understands the task. The teacher will collect papers and write the sentences on the blackboard in poetry form. Then, the teacher will read poem aloud to class, and discussion will follow.

Lesson Plan #4

Objective Students will be able to recognize Rap as a form of poetry.

Materials Copies of the lyrics to A Teenage Love by Slick Rick, cassette player, cassette recording entitled Mona Lisa by Slick Rick and, copies of the poem Blum by Dorothy Aldis.

Procedure A copy of the lyrics to A Teenage Love and the poem Blum will be handed out to each member of the class. The cassette recording will be played, then the teacher will read the lyrics aloud with emphasis on the rhyming words, next, the teacher will read the poem, then the teacher will ask the students to read the first two stanzas of both hand outs silently. The students will be asked the following questions:

1. What does the poem and the lyrics to the song have in common?
2. What does rhyme do for the poem?
3. Do the first and second stanzas have the same rhythm? Finally, the teacher will ask students to substitute two new words for the two words that rhyme in the first stanza (the new words should not rhyme). Does the poem have the same beat? Try this with the lyrics to the song? Teacher will continue with more discussion of rhyme and meter, citing more examples.

Worksheet (corresponds to lesson plan #2)

* Work with a classmate. Take turns reading the sentence below. Change the pitch of your voice to read this sentence in these three ways:

Tyshon plays baseball.

1. Make a statement
2. ask a question
3. show strong feeling

* Stress the underlined words to give meaning to these sentences. Then explain the meaning of each sentence to your partner.

4. *There' s* a huge dog.
5. There's a *huge* dog.
6. He's crept into my *basement* .
7. He's crept into *my* basement.
8. Did *you* see him?
9. Did you *see* him?
10. *Where* is he going?
11. Where is *he* going?

* Pause at each / mark to give meaning to each sentence. Explain the meaning of the sentence you read. Take turns with your partner.

12. Mary said/ he is here.
13. Mary/ said he is here.
14. Marquis/ is the best player here.
15. Marquis is the best/ player here.
16. Jamie/ your friend is going.
17. Jamie your friend/ is going.

Read each of these sentences in 4 different ways. Ask your partner to tell which of the feelings below you are trying to show.

SURPRISE ANGER JOY FEAR

18. Mike's going away.
19. Lasonda is coming tomorrow.

20. Is this really yours?

21. What should I say?

Here is a list of other Rap personalities whose music I listened to while researching for this unit:

L.L. Cool J.

Kwame

Big Daddy Kane

Heavv D. and the Boys

Salt and Pepper

Roxanne

The Real Roxanne

D.J. Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince

Ice-T.

Rob Base and D.J. Easy Rock

Erik B. and Rakim

Student's Bibliography

Adoff, Arnold , ed. *I Am The Darker Brother* . New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968.

An anthology of modern poems by negro americans.

Adoff, Arnold, *All The Colors Of The Race* . New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books, 1982.

Adoff. Arnold, *Sports Pages* . New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1986.

Illustrations by Steve Kuzma.

Adoff, Arnold, *Outside Inside Poems* . New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books, 1981.

Baron, Virginia Olsen, ed., *Here I Am!* New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1969.

An anthology of poems written by young people in some of America's minority groups.

Bennett , Jill, *Days Are Where We Live* and other poems. New York: Lothrop, Lee, & Shepard Books, 1981.

Ciardi, John, *The Man Who Sang The Sillies* . New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1961.

Eastwick, Ivy O. *Cherry Stones! Garden Swings!* New York: Abingdon Press, 1962.

Feeling, Tom, Grimes, Nikki, *Something On My Mind* . New York: The Dial Press, 1978.

Feeling, Tom, Greenfield, Eloise, *DayDreamers* . New York: The Dial Press, 1981.

Fisher, Aileen, *In The Woods In The Meadow In The Sky*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965.

Fisher, Aileen, *Skip Around The Year*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1972.

Fleming, Alice, *Hosannah The Home Run!* Poems about Sports, Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1972.

Frost, Robert, *Stopping By Woods On A Snowy Evening* . Ill. by Susan Jeffers, New York: E.P. Dutton, 1978.

Giovanni, Nikki, *Spin A Soft Black Song* . New York: Hill and Wang, 1971.

Greenfield, Eloise, *Honey I Love* . New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1972.

Hubbell, Patricia, *Catch Me A Wind* . New York: Antheneum, 1972.

Hughes, Langston, *Don't You Turn Back* . New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1969. Poems by Langston Hughes selected by Lee Bennett Hopkins.

Larrick, Nancy, *I heard A Scream In The Street* . New York: M.Evans and Company, Inc., 1970. Poems by young people in the city.

McCord, David, *All Small* . Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1986.

Prelutsky, Jack, *Read-Aloud Rhymes* for the very young. New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1986.

Udipe, John, *A Child's Calendar* . New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1965.

Wesley-Smith, Peter, *The Ombley Gombley* . First American Edition, New York: Antheneum , 1971.

Teacher Bibliography

- Aiken, Conrad, ed. *Twentieth Century American Poetry* , New York: Random House, 1963.
- Angelou, Maya, *Maya Angelou Poems* . Revised edition, New York: Bantam Books, 1973.
- Angelou, Maya, *Shaker. Why Don't You Sing* . New York: 1983.
- Angelou, Maya, *And Still I Rise*. New York: Random House, 1978.
- Angelou, Maya, *Now Sheba Sings The Song* , New York: Dial Books, 1987.
- Bontemps, Arna, ed. *American Negro Poetry* . New York: Hill and Wang, 1974.
- Cole, William, ed. *Humorous Poetry for Children* . Ohio: World Publishing Co., 1955.
- Eller, William, Gordon, Edward J., Welch, Betty Yvonne, *Introduction to Literature* . Revised edition, Massachusetts: Ginn and Company, 1975.
- Ginn and Company, *Language 6* , Revised edition, Massachusetts: Ginn and Company, 1983.
- Hughes, Langston, *Selected Poems* . Revised edition, New York: Vintage, 1974.
- Koch, Kenneth and Farrell, Kate, *Sleeping on the Wing* . New York: Vintage, 1981.
- Koch, Kenneth, *Wishes , Lies, and Dreams* . New York: Harper and Row, 1970.
- Mckuen, Rod, *Listen to the Warm* . Revised edition, New York: Random House, 1983.
- Schores, Robert, *Elements of Poetry* , New York: Oxford Press, 1969.

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>