



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

RAP: Reading in the Arts and Poetry

Curriculum Unit 89.02.09
by Barbara W. Coles Trader

Text: According to current research, poetry is a very important phase of language arts/literature. Reading poetry includes many things in a text such as speaking, listening, thinking, comprehending, writing and interpreting. Other subject areas and skills will be highlighted in my poetry unit such as grammar, punctuation, capitalization, rhythms/music, pictography and visual arts for grades 6-8.

The reading and writing of poetry will be a weekly lesson during each of the ten months. Two pieces of poetry written by renowned poets monthly will be used: 2 poems x 10 months = 20 poems during the school year. I will use numerous literary works of gifted black poets of the 20th century: Nikki Giovanni, Paul L. Dunbar, Countee Cullen, Audre Lorde, Gwendolyn Brooks, Le Roi Jones and Langston Hughes. Words of visual arts and the music of "Rapping" will be in one of the lesson plans.

Listening Comprehension

Listening is a highly receptive language in our American society. We usually spend more time listening to others than speaking, reading or writing to others. In his current article, *Listening Comprehension*, D.C. Norton notes that "students are expected to listen at least 60 percent of the school day, but the amount of instructional time given to the development of listening comprehension is far less than the time devoted to the other language arts skills" (p.30). ¹ Hence, I agree with a renowned African American author, Maya Angelou, who says that "words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with the shades of deeper meaning". ²

A. Writing directions is an excellent prelistening strategy. The students can write a set of directions when given by the teacher. The directions can be given to explain how to get to a particular classroom. The teacher can emphasize the listening and thinking stages by encouraging the students to apply their knowledge and experiences. This activity also provides a study for the various purposes of writing to different audiences.

B. The instructor will read short poems of 8-10 lines that are suitable for students who are in grades 6-8, such as: *I, Too, Sing America* written by Langston Hughes (p.75). ³ I will read aloud the poem which will be recorded on the cassette tape for listening comprehension, because students also enjoy listening to tapes. I will omit the title of the poem, but I will state who the author is. Anyone who needs the selection of poems that I will be using in this unit can contact me at Jackie

Robinson Middle School. After the students have listened to the poem, they will be given 4-5 multiple choice questions on duplicated sheets of paper for example:

1. What is the darker brother in the poem doing? a. washing dishes b. setting the table c. eating in the kitchen d. singing songs
2. Tomorrow when company comes I will
 - a. eat in the kitchen.
 - b. take exercise.
 - c. mow the lawn.
 - d. be at the table.
3. They will also see how
 - a. fast I am.
 - b. beautiful I am.
 - c. ashamed I am.
 - d. funny I am.
4. Which title best describes this poem?
 - a. The Darker Brother
 - b. When Tomorrow Comes
 - c. I, Too, Sing America
 - d. I Am So Strong

I will use the above strategy throughout the school year for listening skills, but I will gradually introduce poetry with longer lines maximum 24 lines for grade 8.

Reading and Writing

I will write and read aloud with the students. One of the most effective ways to demonstrate comprehension is

through the connection of reading and writing. In the process, readers become writers who articulate their understanding and connections to the poetic text in their responses. A response is an expression and explanation of comprehension. The meaning of comprehension is to use writing for the connections of reality for our prior knowledge, and to interpret the poetic text. The writing of dialectical journals/readers' responses to poetic text is one of the best ways to give students opportunities and to unravel their transactions so that the teacher can observe how students understand the process and help them to elaborate, clarify and illustrate their responses. The responses will be in reference to the associations/prior knowledge that should inform students. Please refer to the "Poetry Workshop Sessions" that are addressed in the lesson plans of this unit for further information.

I have read an useful book about reading poetry entitled, *Elements of Poetry*. Scholes notes that "reading a poem for the first time ought to be a little like meeting a person for the first time." (p.7) My students and I will gain some insight into the process of reading poems by the authors that I have mentioned. I will begin by asking the students to read the text of the poem. Secondly, I will ask the students to complete the process offered in Robert Scholes' book; he suggests 5 steps in approaching a poem. He says, "reading poetry aloud helps us to establish our grasp of it especially if a patient and knowledgeable teacher is there to correct our performance and encourage us to try again" (pp.83-86). The students will close with the discussion of two poems by Nikki Giovanni. Poem I *Two Friends* (lines 1-11: p.25). Poem II *Some Things Are Funny Like That* (lines 1-20: p.23) in her book, *Spin A Soft Black Song*. The students will read the poems aloud; they will rewrite the poems conventionally, using capital letters and punctuation correctly. The reason for selecting Giovanni's above book is that the writing mechanics can be easily used.

Studies have examined the relationships between reading and writing from an interactive perspective. There were two major components observed:

1. The role of reading while writing was occurring.
2. The more indirect effect that reading has on a writer. Frank Smith states that, "reading influences writing skills because readers unconsciously read like writers". Smith's article is in the *Journal of Reading*, 1987. (pp.8-9).

The interaction of reading and writing influence each other in terms of persons' achievements. The understanding and meaning of a text is composed simultaneously by readers and writers in order for a new event to emerge, because reading and writing work together as tools. Reading and writing are tools for information storage, retrieval, discovery, logical thinking, communication and self-indulgence. I agree with current research that writing improves reading, and reading improves writing. Writing engages the students in creating and discovering meaning. Writers construct meaning when using their own words and ideas. Reading also engages the students in creating and discovering meaning. Readers construct meaning by using the words and ideas of writers through their individual backgrounds of knowledge and experiences.

I will promote reflective thinking by asking the students questions that demand higher levels of reasoning and predicting. Some samples will be in the lesson plans of this unit. I believe that new knowledge occurs when at least two or more people share their perspectives about an event and/or experience. I will tell the students that reading and writing different forms of language, literature and composition, which include poetry, will be equally valued in my classes.

Cooperative/Collaborative Reading and Writing of Poetry

The students will be in subgroups of two and no more than three in a group. (1) The teacher will read the text so that the text becomes clear to the listener/s for listening comprehension and the like. (2) The students will be given individual opportunities to read the text aloud for reinforcing what is thought to be the author's intended emphasis and viewpoint. The readers will read in the tone of voice in which they think the poetic verses should be expressed. There will not be any right or wrong answers during this period. (3.) The readers will reread the text silently and/or aloud to interpret/dramatize the poem. (4.) The readers will be encouraged to read the poetic text aloud as though they are the authors. "Speak to each other about the text through your readings, urged Maya Angelou in the " *Institute/Workshop for Writing/Thinking*" on October 28, 1988. ⁷

The students will be given opportunities to write their own poems. Writing provides a natural environment for building comprehension, because the print conveys meaning. It has been observed that good writers and readers are more likely to reflect on their own texts; poor readers and writers find it difficult to reflect on their own texts. I will have two major "Poetry and Writers' Work Session groups". They will be "Independent and Semi-Independent" within subgroups of 2 or 3 students. *Cooperative and Collaborative* learning will be continued for speaking, listening, reading and writing as social activities. Notetaking skills with responses on a graphic organizer (chalkboard, overhead projector, bulletin board and the like) will be demonstrated.

I will use various innovative techniques and teaching strategies when teaching poetry to my students. I will use six (6) basic steps when teaching reading in the content area of literature which are the following.

I. Lesson Plans

Step #1. Preparation for Reading Establishing Prior Knowledge: (I will write the title of the poem and author on the chalkboard, *Dreams* by Langston Hughes).

Goal The students will read and discuss the poem.

Objective The teacher and students will read the poem for enjoyment.

Student's Prior Knowledge: I will elicit answers from the students about the word *Dreams*. I will use "group clustering", which is a creative writing technique, that will start with the word *Dreams* in a circle on a large sheet of newsprint paper. In response to the key word, *Dreams*, I will connect the students' related words by diagramming/mapping. In Gabriele Ricco's book (p.10), "clustering shifts from a sense of randomness to a sense of direction which enables people to write in a more natural way." ⁸ #2 Purpose Establishing Fluency in Oral Reading: (I will read the poem aloud for modeling *Fluency in Oral Reading*). *Oral reading fluency* is reading in phrases with appropriate intonation and inflection. This is a complex process since literary writings usually provide very few cues for the readers. I will read the poem with expression and demonstrate appropriate expression for specific punctuation marks. The students will be given the opportunity to read the poem in the same manner. The rereadings can be done silently and within the students' subgroups. Easier poetic material will help to facilitate development of *reading fluency*.

Step #2 Purpose for Reading Teacher: "Can anyone tell me what a *dream* is? I will ask the student/s to read the title. I will review with the students very briefly about semantic mapping which was done in their prior lesson when I used *Dreams*. The students will take turns to read aloud and find why it is important to hold onto *dreams*.

Step #3 Directed Reading Students will be directed to sit in their "Cooperative and Collaborative Learning"

groups. Students will be directed to use their double-entry journals (the left-column).

1. The students will read the poem silently and record their notations. (Remember there are no right or wrong answers when doing Step #3). Time limit will vary according to the length of a poem.
2. I will ask the students to brainstorm possible answers/solutions and each student in his/her subgroup will write the answers in the left-column of the notebooks. (A few minutes will be allotted to answer each question).

Question 1. Why is it important to hold onto *dreams* ?

Question 2. What might have happened if you had not held onto your dream /s?

Question 3. What two things are being compared in line 3 of the first stanza?

Question 4 What two things are being compared in line 3 of the second stanza?

3. Finally, a student in each subgroup will take a daily turn to compile the answers within his/her group, and make an oral report in the class (several minutes will be allotted for each group report).

Step #4 DiscussionTeacher:

1. I will reread the poem aloud and have students follow along silently. I will have students volunteer and take turns to read the poem aloud. I will use variations of poetic readings: The first line in each stanza will be read by someone, and another group will read the other three lines.
2. I will solicit answers for the questions in step #3. I will ask students do they want to jot down modifications/make changes in their left-columns? (they are encouraged not to erase the notations and answers which they have previously written.)
3. I will discuss the answers and interpretations of the poem which deal with a higher accuracy. The students will write the final answers in the right-columns (second column). The students will copy the answers from an overhead projector or large newsprint paper. The answers are as follows:

Answer 1. Just as a bird with a broken wing cannot fly and barren fields cannot grow anything, neither can dreams come true if people do not hold onto them.

Answer 2. (Answers will vary according to individual students).

Answer 3. Life and the broken-winged bird. Teacher: I will remind the students that a *metaphor* is a figure of speech in which two things are compared.

Answer 4. Life and a barren field.

Step #5. Expanding Skills and Abilities This *step* can be used for reinforcing and reviewing a lesson/s (homework, written reports, quizzes, tests, word identification and the like). I will teach word identification and writing in this lesson. More sophisticated forms of comprehension can be learned through writing as students progress in their writings. Writing is one of the most practical and valuable vocabulary work sessions that I can provide for my students to meet their individual needs, strengths and weaknesses. I have found that students will write about subjects that are meaningful to them. In so doing, the students use *high frequency words* and the more colorful words needed for the content that they choose in creative writing. This yields student's ownership of those selected words. Students will reinforce the identification of more difficult *high frequency words* and the vocabulary of words (correct spelling is not highlighted at this point). Students will broaden their bases of familiar words through use of those words needed to vary the subject. Later, I will use all procedures in the "process of writing." (prewriting, writing and post writings). The development of sentences and paragraphs will become longer. Students will have many opportunities to develop not only their writing skills but to enjoy individual expression in order to strengthen an individual ownership of vocabulary. Students who learn simultaneously to read and write profit from the extra dimension, because reading and writing are reciprocal. The right-columns will have the correct answers reinforced by me, the teacher. I will let the students copy the correct word meanings in the right-columns of their notebooks such as:

1. "Hold fast" in the poem *Dreams* , means hold onto tightly/firmly.
2. "Barren" means unable to grow things.

Step #6 Enrichment/Enhancement Activities Students will be allowed to do visual arts which relate to their individual poems and/or class poems, write *Rapping* music and/or other lyrics, do photography and the like for homework and classwork.

1. In this lesson, I will have two large pictures of a man and woman. The most obvious features on their faces will be the *chins* . *Chin* is the title of the poem written by poet Edward Lear. The students will be given an opportunity to do their individual drawings/sketches if they so desire.
2. I will explain that the poem is a *limerick*. The students will write in their double-entry journals/notebooks in the right-columns the following information:
 - a. *Limericks* have 5 lines and lines 1, 2 and 5 rhyme; lines 3 and 4 rhyme. The students will read the *limerick* silently to see how ridiculous it is. (They are reading the poem for fun).

3. Teacher: I will have a class discussion and solicit answers for the following questions:

Question 1. What has been exaggerated in the poem?

Answer : The *chin* and the idea that the person could play a harp with the *chin* .

Question 2 . What student can read aloud the incomplete *limerick* without filling in the blanks? An example: “There once was a giant named Paul

who grew exceptionally ____

While cutting huge trees.

He stood on his ____

For short ones, he just had to crawl.”

4. Then, I will ask for the correct words. Yes, *tall* and *knees* are correct. One student will read the *limerick* aloud, pausing for the entire class to fill the missing words.

5. All of the students will write their own *limericks* . I will suggest some opening lines to get them started:

a. “There once was a dancer named Jill. . . .

b. There once was a singer named Sue. . . .

6. As the school year progresses, I will highlight the writing of “Reggae/Rapping” in my school lessons for Enrichment/Enhancement Activities. The professional “rappers” (cassette/videotapes) will be highlighted who produce positive messages and no language of profanity such as: Big Daddy, Kane, singing *Ain’t No Half Stepping* . Kool Moe Dee singing *Self-Destruction*; Kool has a college degree in communications. I will let the students read Kool’s biography for positive peer role-modeling to build the students’ self-esteem and the like. Jazzy Jeff and Fresh Prince will add a touch of Jazz when they are *rapping* . The students will read the dialogue of their interviews; I have available copies for each student. The first three female “rappers” came from Los Angeles, California; they are called J.J. Fad (Dania Birks, Juana Burns and Michelle Franklin). J.J. Fad = Just Jamming Fresh and Def. Their first-single *rapping* song is entitled, *Supersonic* . Their *rapping* words have positive relevant and clean messages for good role-modeling.

7. Quincey Jones, Jr. (a renowned Africa American musician, producer, composer and arranger said that *Rap* music is the art of rhythmic-talking over a steady beat. Quincey was born 1933 and is from the South Side of Chicago, Illinois. *Rap* began forming in the streets of (Harlem) New York

City, New York during the late 1970's. Historically, the roots of *Rap* are from Africa and expanded mainly in Jamaica, West Indies as *Reggae* music developed several centuries ago and came to New York City in the 1950's. I will expand the topic and further the lessons when teaching within the school year. The students will do research in "What is Jazz and the Roots of Jazz from West Africa?"

II. Expanded Activities/Lesson Plans/Samples

A. Goal: Students will write and read poetry

Objective: Identifying *metaphors* and *similes*

1. Students will draw a picture that illustrates the following *metaphors* : " *the garden was a jungle* which means the garden was thick with plants."

2. Students will write at least 3 (three) metaphors of their own. Teacher's examples on Chalkboard: "A car and snail are being compared."

3. *Metaphor* means to compare two things. Students will write poems using their drawings and using photographs.

4. *Simile* means a figure of speech in which one thing is likened explicitly to another, a dissimilar thing by the use of comparative words such as "like" or "as" ("a heart as big as a whale").

5. Draw a picture that illustrates the following *similes* " John James was so tall that he towered over his classmates like a *skyscraper* ".

6. Students will identify three *similes* on a worksheet. I will quote some similes and metaphors from some of the poems that will be used in the lessons.

7. Students will write at least three of their own similes.

8. Students will do the previous Activity #3.

B. Goal: Students will do higher levels of listening and reasoning skills through poetry.

Samples : Objective and Activity:

#1 Given to infer main idea: I will read the poem, *Basketball* , by Nikki Giovanni to the students and ask them to give an appropriate title.

#2 Given to evaluate the outcome: Prior to reading a portion of Langston Hughes's poem, *Dream Variations* I will have a chart with three alternate endings. After reading the poem aloud to the students, I will ask them to vote on the ending that they prefer.

#3 Given to recall imagery/details: The students will read aloud and silently Nikki Giovanni's poem, *Springtime*, which gives a vivid mental picture. The students will be directed to draw their mental pictures.

#4. Given to identify the author's purpose: I will reread one of the above poems aloud to the students and solicit their answers: What was the author's purpose for writing the selection (to inform, persuade, entertain or to express feelings)?

#5. Given to use the context: I will let the students fill in the missing words in Langston Hughes's poem, *Juke Box Love Song* .

#6. Given to recognize sequences: Students will rearrange the strips of papers with the recorded sequences from a poetic selection. Students will be in their subgroups to do the correct ordering.

#7. Given to recall sequences: I will read a poem to the students. I will direct them to divide a sheet of paper into sequences (one for each incident) and number each square. Finally, I will ask the students to draw a picture in each square depicting the sequence of events in the poetic selection/s.

Notes

1. D.C. Norton. "Listening Comprehension" *Annual Summary of Investigations Relating to Reading* . July 1, 1987-June 30, 1988. Delaware: International Reading Association, 1989. The current research report gives educators relevant information about listening and comprehension skills for elementary and secondary students.

2. Maya Angelou. "Dialogues" *Language Arts Institute* . Delaware: IRA, 1987. The video tape is available for educators in grades 6-12 at the International Reading Association Headquarters.

3. Langston Hughes. *Selected Poems of Langston Hughes*. New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1974 and 1987. The poem book is an excellent paperback for teachers and students to use with ease.

4. Robert Scholes. "Approaching A Poem" *Elements of Poetry* . New York: Oxford University Press, 1969. The small paperback book is an excellent professional resource.
5. Ibid.
6. Frank Smith. "A Theory of Writing and Reading" *The Journal of Reading* . Delaware: International Reading Association, 1987. The theories, models and research in processes of reading and language arts are addressed in the field of education.
7. Maya Angelou (Refer to the above #2).
8. Gabriele L. Rico. *Writing the Natural Way* . New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983. The book emphasized using the right-brain techniques to release one's expressive powers. The "clustering" is highly useful for creative writing.

Resources/Reading Lists for Students

1. Studio Museum in Harlem. "African Art" 144 West 125th Street, New York, New York 10027. (212) 864-4500. Wed.-Fri. 10 a.m.-5 p.m.: Sat.-Sun. 1-6 p.m.
2. Other names of Art Museums are available upon request.
3. Refer to the *Footnotes* and *Bibliography* for students' educational materials.
4. Nikki Giovanni. *Spin A Soft Black Song* . New York: Hill and Wang, 1985. Some other poems that I will teach in the classroom are "The Funeral of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Kidnap Poem: A Robin's Poem: Basketball: Let's Take A Nap: Parents Never Understand: Trips: How Nice You Look: Mattie Lou at Twelve: Stars: Heavy Rap and If."
5. Gwendolyn Brooks. *In the Mecca* . Illinois: Harper Row, 1968. The poem "Take Time" will be taught to the students.
6. Audre Lorde. *Chosen Poems* . New York: Columbia University Press, 1982. I will use some of her poems in the classroom. Audre was born in New York City. She studied at Hunter College, Columbia University and in Mexico. One of her poems is "A Woman Speaks."
7. Countee Cullen. "Heritage and mat Bright Chimeric Beast" are the two poems which I will use in some lessons. Houghton Mifflin.
8. Paul L. Dunbar. "Sympathy: We Wear the Mast and A Song" are three poems that I will present to my classes. *Literature for Junior High Students* . New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1978 (refer to the above #7).
9. LeRoi Jones (Imamu Amiri Baraka). "Cold Term" is a poem which presents different ideals and will be good for critical thinking skills. *Black Authors Speak* . New York: Hill and Wang, 1968.

10. Langston Hughes. "Africa: Democracy: Harlem Night Song and Dream Variations" are poems which will be given to the students in my classroom. *Black Authors Speak* is written by Arna Bontemps and George H. Bass (refer to the above #9).

Bibliography for Teachers

Alvermann, Donna. *Making Readers Independent* . Delaware: International Reading Association, 1987. The book offers excellent information about helping to make students in grades K-12 independent readers.

Jones, Quincey. "Reggae and Rapping" *Let Us Get It Straight and Right On* . New Jersey: D.S. Magazines, Inc. (Volume 19, Number 11), 1989. This magazine is very appealing to pre-teens, teenagers, adults, and especially whose ethnic culture is African American.

Koch, Kenneth. *Wishes Lies and Dreams* . New York: Harper and Row, 1970. Readable poems by young authors are in the book. The paperback includes various ways to teach youngsters how to write poetry.

Koch, Kenneth. *Sleeping on the Wing* . New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1982. The paperback is an *Anthology of Modern Poetry* with Essays on Reading/Writing. It is suitable for high school and college students.

Painter, Helen. *Poetry and Children* . Delaware: International Reading Association, 1970. The elements of poetry is described with a good selection of poetry for students of all ages.

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