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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1994 Volume II: Poetry in the Classroom: Incentive and Dramatization

Using Poetry in Teaching Reading to Special Education Students

Guide for Curriculum Unit 94.02.01
by William M. Dillon

This unit examines how poetry may be used in teaching reading to special education students. The unit is designed for middle-school students in full-time, special education classes who are reading between the second- and fourth-grade levels. This unit may be adapted for use with younger or older special education students, or with younger students in regular education classes.

While taking into consideration the learning characteristics of special education students, this unit focuses on the elements of rhyme and rhythm in poems and how these elements may be used to aid the teacher in planning successful reading lessons. The unit examines different types of poems and teaching strategies that may be used in teaching reading. Central to this unit is the idea that remedial reading students require a great deal of practice and repetition to master sight words, decoding skills and fluency in comprehension and independent reading. The unit demonstrates that poems have an advantage over prose selections and can readily be used in phonics and word study, as well as vocabulary development. The unit stresses using different kinds of poems, rhyming and non-rhyming, along with a variety of reinforcing activities, to create reading lessons suited to adolescents who are reading several years below grade level.

(Recommended for Remedial Reading, grades 6-8)

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