

Poetry for Dummies

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INTRODUCTION

I must admit that I am no expert when it comes to poetry. I feel intimidated at times when I am asked to give a scholarly interpretation of a complicated poem. My comfort zone lies in simple, fun, rhyming poetry. One objective in the reading curriculum I teach is to introduce poetry to our students and provide guidance for them in how to interpret, analyze, and write poetry. It is as intimidating for me as the students.

From this Creative Writing seminar I wish to create a curriculum unit in which an introduction to poetry is covered. The goal of this unit is to provide simple and clear ways to bring poetry into the classroom. Since I teach sixth grade, I don't expect the students to be able to write or analyze poetry that is unduly complicated. I would, however, like to introduce them to ways of analyzing poetry and interpreting lines. I would also like the students to attempt writing some poetry following the guidelines and concepts taught in the unit. The students will read independently and orally many different types of poems. I hope to also provide resources for students to be able to interpret these poems. Finally, they will write some poetry they are comfortable with.

This unit is good for my students because my task is to introduce a variety of literary genres to the students. Middle school is really a time for them to become independent readers and find what they are most interested in reading. Poetry may be the undiscovered genre for them.

WHAT WILL THIS UNIT TEACH?

The unit will teach poetry in oral and written form. The foundation of the unit will come from a series of books called *Poetry for Young People*. This series includes poetry from famous poets whose poems are tailored to young people. Some of the poets include Emily Dickinson, Carl Sandburg, Walt Whitman, William Carlos Williams, Edgar Allan Poe, and Robert Frost. I like these books because they are fully illustrated and easy to read. In addition to these books, we will use some other author compilations from poets who write for children, such as Shel Silverstein and Jack Prelutsky. We will also use some compilations from authors who don't necessarily write for children, but whose poems can sometimes be used for children, such as Langston Hughes and Nikki Giovanni.

Introducing poetry and reading poetry is just the first step. We will lead into an analysis of poetry, looking at specific terms and concepts like simile, metaphor, rhyme, and mood. We will look at various poetic forms and learn the guidelines to follow. Then we will write original poetry using the concepts we have learned.

WHY IS THE TOPIC IMPORTANT?

Poetry is an entire genre of literature. It is, in my opinion, also the most challenging genre. Historical fiction, realistic fiction, mystery and the like are easily interpreted and mostly straight forward. Poetry isn't so. There is so much thought process to poetry that interpretations can vary among readers. It can be intimidating to attempt to analyze a piece of poetry. Hopefully this unit

will do its part to break down any anxiety when attempting to tackle poetry. I certainly will have to overcome my anxiety in order to write the unit.

Why are people turned off by poetry? I believe it's because we like to have structure and finality to things. Poetry gives us neither. No two poems are the same and most poems leave the reader to think about some open-ended question or situation. It is so free and unstructured that it's difficult for some readers, me included. Perhaps if we look at it knowing it is intimidating, we can take baby steps to conquer it.

Even more intimidating is writing original poetry. So, of course, we'll have to do that in this unit as well. What's the fun of being a reading teacher if you can't torture the students with poetry? Seriously, once the hill is halfway conquered, the rest is easily attainable.

HOW WILL I TEACH THIS UNIT?

I will read several pieces of work to the students. I will also give them a few poems to read silently. I will ask them to choose the poem they were most drawn to. They will write a quick response as to why they were drawn to that poem. The class will then be divided into groups, each group having chosen the same poem. The students will discuss within that group why each was drawn to the same poem. I'm sure the answers will vary and have perhaps some overlap. That will be the catalyst to our discussion of poetry. The poems I plan on using include the following titles: "Smart" by Shel Silverstein (35), "My First Best Friend" by Jack Prelutsky (*It's Raining*, 14), "2nd rapp" by Nikki Giovanni (*ego-tripping*, 37), "Cat Speak" by Bobbi Katz (Janeczko, *Dirty Laundry*, 28), "Mother to Son" by Langston Hughes (*Langston Hughes Poems*, 24), and "The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe (15). I believe that this group of poems has a wide variety of form, subject, and length. This will provide a good range of poetry from which the students can choose. You may choose different poems depending on the abilities of your students.

We will raise the questions, "What defines a poem?", "What makes a poem effective?", "Why does an author choose to write poetry over a short story, or other form of story telling?" I expect the initial reactions to be slow in coming. However, I think that recognizing the fact that each student within the group chose the same poem, gives the students something to work with. There must be some characteristic that all these students were drawn to or enjoyed. That is where we will begin our thought process of the qualities of a good poem. Of course it will be subjective, and that's fine. My goal is to get the students to think about poetry. They should be critically analyzing text for the purpose of explaining the pros and cons of the work as well as the pros and cons of the genre as a whole.

After introducing poetry in this way, we will begin our lessons. I will teach similes and metaphors, mood, and rhyme. After these concepts are mastered, I will go into teaching various poetic forms. This is where the students will begin to write original poetry. Having taught these poetic forms at the end of this school year, I can tell you that the students ate it up. They were excited each day about what new form they would learn, and they couldn't wait to grab a partner and begin writing. I hope the same effect is seen in your classroom.

SIMILES AND METAPHORS

We will now look at similes and metaphors and how they contribute to poetry. The definition of both terms can be found in the appendix of this unit. Similes compare two unlike things using the words "like" or "as." A metaphor compares two unlike things by say one thing *is* another thing.

Read the poem “I’m nobody! Who are you?” by Emily Dickinson:

I’m nobody! Who are you?
Are you nobody, too?
Then there’s a pair of us—don’t tell!
They’d banish us, you know.

How dreary to be somebody!

How public, like a frog

To tell your name the livelong day
To an admiring bog! (12)

See if the students can identify the simile in this poem. What is being compared here? The simile compares frog and public. The author is showing her disgust at the possibility of having everyone know you. The same way that everyone knows a frog. In this instance she is in favor of leading a private, simple life.

A poem that contains two similes is “From a Railway Carriage” by Robert Louis Stevenson. The similes have been highlighted in bold:

Faster than fairies, faster than witches,
Bridges and houses, hedges and ditches;
And charging along like troops in a battle,
All through the meadows the horses and cattle:
All of the sights of the hill and the plain
Fly as thick as driving rain;
And ever again, in the wink of an eye,
Painted stations whistle by.

Here is a child who clammers and scrambles,
All by himself and gathering brambles;
Here is a tramp who stands and gazes;
And there is the green for stringing the daisies!
Here is a cart run away in the road
Lumping along with a man and a load;
And here is a mill, and there is a river:
Each a glimpse and gone forever! (2)

The two similes are “And charging along like troops in a battle” and “Fly as thick as driving rain.” The first line is referring to the speed of the train. The author is revealing all the things that he sees through the window of this railway carriage. The words “charging along” give the feel of continuous movement as well as power. There is power in the numbers of a military troop and this power transcends to the gusto of the railway train. The second simile refers to the vision of the passing hills and plains. The reader can imagine the thick grass of the hill and plain speeding by in one blur. Instead of individual grass leaves, it forms into one solid mass of green sight. Just like thick heavy rain loses the individualness of each drop, so do the blades of grass.

These are just two examples of poems in which I found simile. As a challenge to the students, you might have them look through poetry books and find similes and explain what they mean. As the students begin to write poetry in the latter part of the lesson, you might assign one of the poems to contain at least one simile. The more repetition and exposure they have, the better they will understand this concept, and it will soon become part of their own writing tools.

I have found that metaphor is more difficult to identify. In poetry the metaphor might take place over the entire poem not just in one verse. It takes a little more experience to identify a proper metaphor compared to a simile. Review the terminology with the students for clarification.

As for metaphor I'll use the poem "Bat" by John Malone at the Virtual School for the Gifted. Here the metaphor is directly stated in the first line. This poem should help students directly see how a metaphor works:

My son is a bat.
His eyes blink when darkness comes.
His body stirs with life.
His limbs gorge with blood
as he sets out through the cave of night
his roof the stars
the moon a big white eye watching.
Attracted by the false lights
he mingles with his batty friends
weaving in and out of nightclubs
endless parties
each other's places
till sensing the sudden ebb
of darkness
he flutters home
a cloaked Dracula
to the hollow of his room
where he will sleep all day.

Another poem is "mushroom" by Valerie Worth (102). Read the poem and ask the students what they can hear is being compared, remembering that a metaphor is a direct comparison of two things without the words "like" or "as." Hopefully they will see that the mushroom is being compared to a dim ghost. The author is making a direct comparison saying the mushroom is a dim ghost.

MOOD

For students to understand mood they need to read poems that have a powerful feeling attached to them. The mood is what the reader feels while reading. Ask the students if they have ever read a story and felt an overwhelming emotion that they couldn't explain. An author can bring out in us a varied set of emotions such as sadness, anger, joy, or surprise. The best way to explain mood in my opinion is to ask student to recall the feeling they had the first time they heard a ghost story. Ask them to share those feelings. Explain to the students that this is mood. It is how they, the reader or listener, felt while a story was being read or told.

Good poets evoke strong moods from their writing that readers can't deny. Mood is a good concept to teach using poetry because it is right to the point. Once they understand the concept of mood, it can be carried into lessons with short stories and novels. One poem to look at is "A Sphinx" by Carl Sandburg:

Close-mouthed you sat five thousand years and never let out a whisper,
Processions came by, marchers, asking questions you answered with gray eyes never
blinking, shut lips never talking.
Not one croak of anything you know has come from your cat crouch of ages.
I am one of those who know all you know and I keep my questions: I know the answers
you hold. (13)

This poem brings out a feeling of mystery. The reader can't help but feel intrigued by wondering what the answers are that the writer speaks about. "I know the answers you hold" (Sandburg 13) makes the reader want to know these answers and secrets. Ask the students what mood they felt while you read them this poem.

Another poem is "O Captain! My Captain!" by Walt Whitman:

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won,
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;
 But O heart! heart! heart!
 O the bleeding drops of red,
 Where on the deck my Captain lies,
 Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up-for you the flag is flung-for you the bugle trills,
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths-for you the shores a-crowding,
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
 Here Captain! dear father!
 This arm beneath your head!
 It is some dream that on the deck,
 You've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will,
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done,
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;
 Exult O shores, and ring O bells!
 But I with mournful treat,
 Walk the deck my Captain lies,
 Fallen cold and dead. (38)

This poem has the reader feeling a mood of sadness at the loss of the beloved captain. The author really expresses his confusion of not knowing what to do now that he has realized his leader is dead on the deck. The reader feels sorrow and sadness for the author. We want to help this mate, but we too are helpless.

You can present the previous two poems to the class and have them discuss or write about the mood they felt. You may also choose to use different poems that you enjoy.

RHYME

Not all poetry has to rhyme, but when it does, it is great for read-alouds. Poetry is meant to be read aloud, and rhyming poetry is much more interesting and fun. Some great rhyming poets for children are Jack Prelutsky and Shel Silverstein. They each have numerous compilations from which to choose. Teaching the students to recognize a rhyming pattern is important because it causes them to look at the poem differently. Also, if they can understand rhyme patterns, then when they are assigned to write a rhyming poem, they will be able to follow the guidelines that go along with the assignment.

We'll start with patterns. Explain to students that when we look at the rhyming pattern of a poem we label it with "a, b, c." These letters refer to the end words on each line. All "a's" rhyme

and so on. A basic pattern would be aabbccdd. A good example would be “Sick” by Shel Silverstein:

“I cannot go to school today,”
Said little Peggy Ann McKay.
“I have the measles and the mumps,
A gash, a rash and purple bumps.
My mouth is wet, my throat is dry,
I’m going blind in my right eye.
My tonsils are as big as rocks,
I’ve counted sixteen chicken pox
And there’s one more-that’s seventeen,
And don’t you think my face looks green?
My leg is cut, my eyes are blue-
It might be instamatic flu.
I cough and sneeze and gasp and choke,
I’m sure that my left leg is broke-
My hip hurts when I move my chin,
My belly button’s caving in,
My back is wrenched, my ankle’s sprained,
My ‘pendix pains each time it rains.
My nose is cold, my toes are numb,
I have a sliver in my thumb.
My neck is stiff, my voice is weak,
I hardly whisper when I speak.
My tongue is filling up my mouth,
I think my hair is falling out,
My elbow’s bent, my spine ain’t straight,
My temperature is one-o-eight.
My brain is shrunk, I cannot hear,
There is a hole inside my ear.
I have a hangnail, and my heart is-what?
What’s that? What’s that you say?
You say today is...Saturday?
G’bye, I’m going out to play!” (58)

With this poem every two lines end in a rhyming word. However, the rhyme does not repeat throughout the poem. Each stanza of two lines stands alone in its rhyme. This poem has short verses so it is a pleasure to hear read aloud. The students can really appreciate the rhythm as well as the rhyme.

Another example of a rhyming pattern would be “abcbdefe”. An example would be “The Underwater Wibbles” by Jack Prelutsky:

The Underwater Wibbles
dine exclusively on cheese,
they keep it in containers
which they bind about their knees,
they often chew on Cheddar
which they slice into a dish,
and gorge on Gorgonzola
to the wonder of the fish.

The Underwater Wibbles
wiggle blithely through the sea,
munching merrily on Muenster,
grated Feta, bits of Brie,
passing porpoises seem puzzled,
stolid octopuses stare,
as the Wibbles nibble Gouda,
Provolone, Camembert.

The Underwater Wibbles
frolic gaily off the coast,
eating melted Mozzarella
served on soggy crusts of toast,
Wibbles gobble Appenzeller
as they execute their dives,
oh, the Underwater Wibbles
live extraordinary lives. (*The New Kid on the Block*, 16)

As an independent assignment give students several different poems and see if they can figure out the rhyming pattern. Some examples would be “Ma! Don’t Throw That Shirt Out” by Jack Prelutsky. Another great poem to use is “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost (21).

POETIC FORMS

In this section we will concentrate on various poetic forms. Each form has specific rules it must follow to classify as a form. These forms are good to introduce and teach to the students because it gives them a sense of how broad poetry can be. A handout of the poetic forms and definitions is helpful for the students. When I taught these forms to the students I allowed them to choose a partner with whom to write an original poem. The students wrote a poem following the guidelines of each poetic form. At the end of the unit the students chose the two favorite poems they wrote and rewrote them on plain white paper with illustrations if chosen. I then took these poems and copied them and bound them so each student received a book of poetry written by his or her classmates. They absolutely loved it. This might be a good long term project for them to work on piece by piece.

I have pulled my information on poetic form from a wonderful book titled *Teachers and Writers Handbook of Poetic Forms*. I have found it to be one of the most helpful books in writing this curriculum unit. The poetic forms I have included below are just a few of the many, many forms that are described in the book. I would recommend that you get a copy of this book for teaching this unit and also to have in your personal collection, as it is quite helpful in all aspects of poetry. I see it as a dictionary of poetry forms. Another helpful book is *A Kick in the Head*, containing poetry selected by Paul Janeczko. The *Handbook* is a collegiate academic manual whereas this book is more adolescent friendly. It is meant for a young person to read it and learn various poetic forms. The poetry examples in this book are more suited for children. However, there are a significantly fewer number of forms taught in this book.

Acrostic (uh-CROSS-tic)

The basic acrostic is a poem in which the first letter of each line forms a word or phrase when read vertically. A double acrostic is a form in which the first letter of the line and the last letter of the line form a word or phrase when read vertically. These poems are a fun challenge for the students to create. A simple way to start is to write the word or phrase vertically. Then fill in the words and lines of the poem. This will present a challenge to some students, but overall each student will find that it is a challenge worth accepting. An example of a double acrostic follows.

The first and last letters have been capitalized for easier identification. This example comes from *The Teachers and Writers Handbook of Poetic Forms*:

Many times I
Yelled across the cosmoS
Not knowing to whoM
And/or what everlasting top bananA
Men had sought in faR
EternitY. (5)

Blues Poem

A blues poem is just what it says, a poem in the form of the blues. Typically these poems are about bad times, grief or loss. However, they are also about rising up and having a strong spirit. The blues originated in Africa but have been in America since the early 1900s. Southern slaves sang “field hollers” as they worked, which is a sort of singing talk. Introducing a blues poem to a sixth grader can be a bit challenging because we as adults tend to think that a young child has no basis from which to draw a depressing situation. However, they have most likely lost a loved one, lost a pet, gotten a bad grade or had a fight with a friend. These are situations from which a child can draw from to write a blues poem. The most prolific blues poem writer is Langston Hughes. Although much of his work is not suitable for the classroom, he does have some that can be used. There are such an enormous number of poems from which to choose. The idea is to give the students the feel and idea of what a blues poem is. One of my favorite poems of his is “Free Man,” which is more about the strong spirit than the low times:

You can catch the wind,
You can catch the sea,
But you can’t, pretty mama,
Ever catch me.

You can tame a rabbit,
Even tame a bear,
But you’ll never, pretty mama,
Keep me caged up here. (*Collected Poems*, 247)

I include another example here to help associate the Blues Poem to a sixth-grade student. This is titled “Back to School Blues” by Bobbi Katz:

Just wiggling my toes in my brand new shoes
Guess I’ve got a case of the back to school blues.
Shiny new notebook with nothing inside it
Feeling kinda scared and trying hard to hide it.
I’ve got 3 sharp pencils I never used before
And a teacher I don’t know behind a classroom door.
Maybe she’s a nice one.
Maybe she’s bad news.
I’m just a wiggling and a jigging to the back to school blues. (Janeczko, *A Kick in the Head*, 50)

Calligram (CAL-ih-gram)

This is a fun poem to teach and write because a calligram poem is written in a shape significant to the meaning of the poem. The restrictions of this unit can’t allow me to demonstrate a calligram poem here; however, I can describe an example. A writer can choose to write a poem about his or her love of the game of basketball. All the essential descriptions and verbs associated with basketball would be included. In addition the poem would be written in a spiral circle or

even in the shape of a true basketball with the outer edge being round and the inner circle forming the lines of a basketball. Another example would be a love poem where the lines take the shape of a heart. This poetic form is great for generating creativity among students. It also gives the poem a completely different feel when it is seen in its visual shape.

Cento (SEN-toe) and Found Poem

I have decided to combine these two forms because they are so similar in their design. A Cento is a poem made from pieces of other poems. In general a writer would take entire lines of several different poems and combine them to make a new poem. In a Found Poem the writer takes parts of a variety of texts and breaks the lines in a pattern to create a poem. Examples of text include newspaper articles, songs, short stories or parts of novels. The writer can take blocks of the text and break the lines into poetic form or choose to take different parts of the text and formulate it into a poem. What I like is a combination of these two forms. I like to have the option of choosing any part of any combination of texts and putting them together to create a totally new piece of work. I have included below an original piece I wrote. I created this poem using the script from the movie *The Empire Strikes Back* by Donald F. Glut and George Lucas, the novel *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* by J. K. Rowling, and the song “Blackbird” by the Beatles.

He Cometh
by Karlene McGowen

Blackbird singing in the dead of night
He lay there beneath the Cloak
Feeling the blood from his nose flow
Another galaxy, another time
But something also blazed within their souls
Fear – fear of merely the sound of the familiar
Heavy footsteps as they echoed through the enormous ship
Take these broken wings and learn to fly
Listening to the voices and footsteps in the corridor beyond
All your life
You were only waiting for this moment to arise
Crew members dreaded these footsteps
And shuddered whenever they were heard approaching
He would be neither seen nor heard
Blackbird fly
Blackbird fly
Towering above them in his black cloak and concealing black headgear
The men around him fell silent
His best hope was that somebody else would walk in
Now the last of the footsteps were dying away
Into the light of the dark black night
Blackbird fly
Blackbird fly
In what seemed to be an endless moment

Free Verse

Free verse is poetry that does not rhyme and does not necessarily have a beat to it. The free verse poem has no rules to it. When choosing a free verse poem to read to the students, it is best to start with one that can easily be understood and interpreted. The great thing about free verse is

that it is easier to write because there are no rules about rhyming or verse length. However, the challenge is to make the free verse poem stay in poetry format and not slip into short story or prose format. Although the writer does not have to choose words that rhyme, he or she does have to choose words carefully that make an impact to the meaning of the poem.

One poem to use as an introduction would be “The Fool’s Song” by William Carlos Williams:

I tried to put a bird in a cage.
O fool that I am!
For the bird was Truth.
Sing merrily, Truth: I tried to put
Truth in a cage!

And when I had the bird in the cage,
O fool that I am!
Why, it broke my pretty cage.
Sing merrily, Truth: I tried to put
Truth in a cage!

And when the bird was flown from the cage,
O fool that I am!
Why, I had nor bird nor cage.
Sing merrily, Truth: I tried to put
Truth in a cage!
Heigh-ho! Truth in a cage. (9)

This is a good poem for provoking thought outside the written word. The author’s beginning lines are “I tried to put a bird in a cage./O fool that I am!/For the bird was Truth.” This quote is alluding to the idea of capturing truth as if it were something to hold on to. It can get the students thinking about what else is something that we value and treasure in our society, yet it cannot be caught or captured. Some possible ideas would be: honesty, respect or loyalty. Student could write a free verse poem with one of these traits as the focal point being sure to use the literary element of personification.

“Communication” by Nikki Giovanni is a free verse poem with a powerful message:

if music is the most universal language
just think of me as one whole note

if science has the most perfect language
picture me as MC^2

since mathematics can speak to the infinite
imagine me as 1 to the first power

what i mean is one day
i’m gonna grab your love
and you’ll be
satisfied (*Selected Poems of Nikki Giovanni*, 162)

This poem also includes several metaphors when Giovanni is comparing herself to inanimate objects such as music, science and mathematics. The author is comparing herself to these things by saying if she were one of those, she would be the whole and best of those it is possible to be. The ending message is that one day she will love you to the point of surprised satisfaction. This free verse poem is only ten lines long, so it makes for a good poem to place on the overhead or chalkboard. It has a pattern in that each subject is given two lines until the end in which “love” is

given four lines. The poem is very straightforward and easy to follow. Though it does not rhyme, students can easily see that it still has many of the characteristics learned in the rhyming poetry above.

By giving some basic guidelines, we can assign the students to write a free verse poem of their own. The guidelines could be as simple as a stated topic that everyone will write about or something a little more structured, such as the poem must contain ten verses. Starting the students with at least some guidelines is necessary because otherwise they will probably feel overwhelmed. We want them writing poetry in any way possible. At this time they will already have written a poem or two using the rhyming patterns. With the free verse poems some students may find it easier because they are not limited by the verses and the requirement of making a rhyming pattern. However, some students may find it more difficult because of the lack of structure. For these students perhaps having a few more free verse poems on hand to show them as an example would be good. Any free verse poem from the collection of poetry that you have on hand could be used. Many of the poems in the *Poetry for Young People* collection are free verse.

Insult Poem

I have chosen to include this type of poem because kids can truly relate to it. We might not agree with its motives, but we cannot deny that students really get a kick out of insults. I would of course put the stipulation on the poem that it cannot mention or be directed at any one student in particular. It must be a general insult that could apply to anyone. An insult poem is just as the name describes. It is designed to be lighthearted and humorous, using exaggeration as its key point. I have included an example given by the *Handbook*:

He's not so bad
He just killed his father by making him eat 10,000 fried chickens.
He's not so bad
He just plugged up his brother's tuba with his little sister.
He's not so bad
He just cleaned his little brother's nose with an electric toothbrush.
He's not so bad
He just fed his cat ballbearings and it sat on a magnet. (Padgett 96)

Pantoum (pan-TOOM)

I like the pantoum because it requires the writer to follow a specific pattern. Many of the poetic forms mentioned above and below do not require any specific pattern, only the topic or subject must comply with the rules. To adequately describe the rules for the pantoum, I will quote directly from the *Handbook* because my words could not possibly be any more descriptive than what they have provided. The pantoum is, "...a poem of indefinite length made up of stanzas whose four lines are repeated in a pattern: lines 2 and 4 of each stanza are repeated as lines 1 and 3 of the next stanza, and so on..." (Padgett 133). In addition, the final stanza has a twist. Lines one and three are from the previous stanza, but lines two and four are lines three and one respectively, from the first stanza. I have included part of a poem below as a sample. This is taken from the *Handbook*:

Because birds are gliding across your brain,
I rise into the shadows
And the mist is rolling in
Because my breath is rolling out.

I rise into the shadows
Like a pond that went to sleep:

Because my breath is rolling out
You hear doorbells in the woods.

(stanzas 3-5 removed for space constraints)

I am filled with ideas about dreams.
The stars don't know what they mean
And a dream can grow like a cloud:
You can't explain this bigness.

The stars don't know what they mean
And the mist is rolling in.
You can't explain this bigness
Because birds are gliding across your brain. (Padgett 134)

Renga (WREN-ga)

This type of poem uses images to make connections between stanzas. However, the uniqueness of a renga is that each stanza has a connecting link in image to the stanza above it and a separate connection in image to the stanza below it. For instance, an image in stanza one will be repeated or connected somehow in stanza two. Then an image or idea in stanza two will be connected in stanza three. However, the image in stanza three has no connection to the image in stanza one. Did you get all that? It will seem disconnected as a whole because the poem will not tell a story. However as the reader continues reading the poem he or she will find that it does flow and has an underlying tie within the poem itself. The following quote helps explain:

Starting: The starting verse must include an image that suggests the season and place where the renga is being written.

Linking: There are many ways to connect, or 'link' one stanza to another in renga. The most important ways involve writing down an image suggested by an image in the previous stanza, by making either a parallel image, a contrasting image, or a shift in focus onto another aspect of the same image. (Padgett 159)

An example is included below. This is from a renga written by New Jersey high school students Susanne Hobson, Amy Ginnett, Karen Watson, and Barbara Watson. This example is taken from *The Handbook*:

the corners
of her mouth
trembling

the moon moves
the tide shifts
sand sinks into sand

the eclipse
a sliver of the sun

teeth marks in the pie
the dog
gets the rest

dentist's office
the sound of the drill

the oil well
pumping
in the barren field (Padgett 161)

Sestina (sess-TEE-na)

This form uses sixes as its base. It contains six unrhymed stanzas of six lines each. The last word of each line in stanza one is repeated in a rotating pattern within the next five stanzas. The poem concludes with a tercet which is a three-line stanza. This tercet uses all six end-words, using two per line. Due to space restraints I will not put an entire sestina below, however I will include the pattern to give an idea of how it's supposed to look.

Letters A-F will represent the six end words that make up the sestina. Stanza 1: ABCDEF, Stanza 2: FAEBDC, Stanza 3: CFDABE, Stanza 4: ECBFAD, Stanza 5: DEACFB, Stanza 6: BDFECA, Tercet: AB, CD, EF.

The lines can be any length and will vary depending on the ability of the student. Although the pattern seems complicated when first introduced, it's really quite logical once you see how it comes together. It is a rather long poem containing 39 lines so writing one will take some time. This might be one of those homework assignments that you give the students a week or two to work on, with periodic checks on progress.

CONCLUSION

The above forms are my personal choices and you can adjust to your liking. As mentioned previously I did teach many of these poetic forms while I was researching this unit. I found that the students truly enjoyed learning new types of poetry, and they enjoyed creating original poems. They were ecstatic about the poetry books they received at the end of the unit.

Learning rhyme, mood, simile and metaphor through poetry is a great foundation for the students. These literary concepts are used through various forms of texts and poetry is one more avenue to introduce or reinforce these concepts.

Writing this unit has helped me understand poetry greatly. I now feel comfortable introducing poetry and discussing it with the students. I hope this unit will help you be a better poetry teacher as well.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson 1

Objective

Students will understand the meaning of simile and metaphor and will be able to identify each in various poems.

Purpose

Simile and metaphor are literary elements that are used in various forms of text. Introducing these concepts through short concise poems is a quick way for students to grasp the idea and concept of what is being taught.

Materials

Poems: "I'm Nobody! Who Are You?" by Emily Dickinson, "From A Railway Carriage" by Robert Louis Stevenson, "mushroom" by Valerie Worth, and "Bat" by John Malone

Activity

Students will be introduced to the definition of simile and metaphor. The class will discuss phrases that would be considered simile and phrases that would be considered metaphor. The teacher will present four poems to the class and the class will read and discuss the poems and the use of simile and metaphor in each.

Assessment

Students will browse other poems and find ones in which simile or metaphor is used.

Lesson 2

Objective

Students will recognize mood in a given text.

Purpose

Students are required to understand mood as a literary device. Introducing mood through the use of short poems provides the students immediate results in understanding the concept.

Materials

“A Sphinx” by Carl Sandburg, and “O Captain! My Captain!” by Walt Whitman

Activity: The students will be introduced to the definition of mood. Students will understand that mood is the feeling they will have while reading. The teacher will present the two poems individually. Discussion will be made about the feelings each poem evokes in the reader. Students will also discuss and discover what element in the poem caused the reader to feel a particular mood.

Assessment

Students will read a poem of their choosing and write a short paragraph about the mood they felt and what elements of the poem caused that particular mood.

Lesson 3

Objective

Students will see the various rhyme patterns associated with poetry.

Purpose

Rhyme is one of the defining characters of poetry. Students need to be able to understand and recognize rhyme patterns, especially when writing original poetry.

Materials

“Sick” by Shel Silverstein and “The Underwater Wiggles” by Jack Prelutsky.

Activity

Teacher will present each poem and show the rhyming pattern associated with it.

Assessment

Teacher will then provide a couple more poems for individual study, and students will record the rhyme pattern they find. Then students will write an original poem using a rhyme pattern learned.

Lesson 4

Objective

Students will become familiar with various poetic forms.

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to get the students active in creating poetry following specific guidelines. Many times it is helpful for a group to tackle the assignment rather than an individual.

Materials

Handout of poetic form definitions and examples. (This can be created by cutting and pasting the information found previously in this document.)

Activity

Each form will be taught separately. After the lesson the students will pair up and write an original poem following the guidelines of that specific form. These lessons will continue until all forms are learned. Usually one lesson per day is a good estimate.

Assessment

Students will be assessed on each poem they write from all the forms presented. The credit will be given based on the ability of the student to create an original poem in the form learned following the specified rules. The final project will be a booklet containing two poems from each student, which may contain illustrations. Each student will receive a copy of the booklet of poetry written by the class.

POETRY VOCABULARY

- Alliteration:** repetition of initial consonant sounds: Sally sells seashells by the seashore
- Assonance:** repetition of vowel sounds without rhyme: the bat had two ants
- Anthology:** collection of works, such as poems, short stories, and/or excerpts from longer works, by the same author
- Consonance:** repetition of consonant sounds: I won't turn tables
- Imagery:** use of sensory details to evoke mental pictures
- Metaphor:** an implied comparison between two unlike things
- Mood:** the feeling or emotion evoked by a piece of text; the way the reader feels while reading
- Poetry:** a piece of writing, written in verse, often with rhythm and rhyme, that describes experiences, feelings, or ideas using powerful language. Poetry condenses, or packs, meaning into few words. Poetry is meant to be read aloud.
- Prose:** speech or writing that is not in verse
- Rhyme:** repetition of the same ending sound, often at the end of a line of poetry
- Rhythm:** the "beat" of writing or speaking; the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables
- Simile:** a comparison of two unlike things using the words "like" or "as"
- Stanza:** division of a poem, made up of two or more lines, comparable to a paragraph in prose
- Verse:** a line of a poem

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works Cited

- Dickinson, Emily. *Poetry for Young People*. Ed. Frances Schoonmaker Bolin. New York: Scholastic, 1994.
This beautifully illustrated book contains many well-known poems by Emily Dickinson. The poems and illustrations are very child friendly. It has an informative introduction about the life of Dickinson. "I'm Nobody! Who Are You?" was used in this unit.
- Frost, Robert. *Poetry for Young People*. Ed. Gary D. Schmidt. New York: Scholastic, 1994.
This beautifully illustrated book contains many well-known poems by Robert Frost. The poems and illustrations are very child friendly. It has an informative introduction about the life of Frost. "The Road Not Taken" was referred to in this unit.
- Giovanni, Nikki. *ego-tripping and other poems for young people*. Westport: Lawrence Hill, 1973.
This is a short book of collected poems by Giovanni. These were selected as poems that young people would enjoy. It contains twenty-three poems. "2nd rapp" was used in this unit.
- . *The Selected Poems of Nikki Giovanni*. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1996.
This is a larger collection of Giovanni poems. They are all levels and all subjects so when using this book the teacher should be selective. Many of her poems are very powerful and address the subject of racism and feminism. "Communication" was used in this unit. This poem can also be found in the above Giovanni reference.
- Hughes, Langston. *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*. Ed. Arnold Rampersad. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.
This is a large anthology of poems by Langston Hughes. It is divided into years. These are poems of various subjects so the teacher should choose the poems that are appropriate for the students. "Free Man" was used in this unit.
- . *Poems/Langston Hughes*. Ed. David Roessel. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999.
This is a pocket size book of poems by Hughes. Each of the poems was taken from the bigger book *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* noted above. "Mother to Son" was used in this unit. This poem is also found in the previous Hughes entry.
- Janezko, Paul B, ed. *Dirty Laundry Pile: Poems in Different Voices*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.
This book is a collection of poems chosen by Janezko. Each poem in this book is written in the voice of an object or animal.
- . *A Kick in the Head: An Everyday Guide to Poetic Forms*. New York: Scholastic, 2005.
This book is a collection of poems by various poets chosen by Janezko. Each one is a different poetic form. The explanation of the poetic forms is provided in the back. The book contains the title of the form and a poem example to go with it. Each poem is suitable for young people.
- Malone, John. *Netting Poetry*. 1998. Virtual School for the Gifted. 28 June 2006.
<<http://www.vsg.edu.au/samples/poetry/npsample.htm>>.
This website was used for the use of "Bat" by John Malone.
- Padgett, Ron. *The Teachers and Writers Handbook of Poetic Forms*. New York: Teachers and Writers Collaborative, 1987.
I cannot say enough how valuable this book was for creating this unit. I highly recommend getting your hands on a copy of this manual for any time you intend to teach poetic forms. It is also a good resource for you to learn more about poetry than you probably ever knew existed. Many poems were used from this book, however, most did not have authors or titles.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. *Poetry for Young People*. Ed. Brod Bagert. New York: Scholastic, 1995.
This book is a collection of poems by Poe that are suitable for young people. The book is fully illustrated. It has an informative introduction about the life of Poe. The book contains 21 poems. "The Raven" was used in this unit.
- Prelutsky, Jack. *The New Kid on the Block*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1984.
This is a collection of poems by Jack Prelutsky. As with all his poems, they are whimsical and humorous. Students really seem to flock to his style of poetry. "The Underwater Wibbles" was used in this unit.
- . *It's Raining Pigs & Noodles*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 2000.
This is a collection of poems by Jack Prelutsky. As with all his poems, they are whimsical and humorous. This collection is newer than the previous book on this list. "My First Best Friend" was used in this unit.
- Sandburg, Carl. *Poetry for Young People*. Ed. Frances Schoonmaker Bolin. New York: Scholastic, 1995.
This beautifully illustrated book contains many well-known poems by Carl Sandburg. The poems and illustrations

are very child friendly. It has an informative introduction about the life of Sandburg. “A Sphinx” was used in this unit.

Silverstein, Shel. *Where the Sidewalk Ends*. New York: Harper Collins, 1974.

This wonderful book by Silverstein will be used over and over again in the classroom. The poems within are short and are a great read-aloud for a warm-up activity or just a closing activity. “Sick” and “Smart” was used in this unit.

Stevenson, Robert Louis. *A Child’s Garden of Verses*. New York: Random House, 1978.

This is a wonderfully illustrated book of poems by Stevenson. The poems are probably not well known by your students so it is a great way to introduce new and wonderful poetry to them. “From A Railway Carriage” was used in this unit.

Whitman, Walt. *Poetry for Young People*. Ed. Jonathan Levin. New York: Scholastic, 1997.

This beautifully illustrated book contains many well-known poems by Walt Whitman. The poems and illustrations are very child friendly. It has an informative introduction about the life of Whitman. “O Captain! My Captain!” was used in this unit.

Williams, William Carlos. *Poetry for Young People*. Ed. Christopher MacGowan. New York: Scholastic, 2004.

This beautifully illustrated book contains many well-known poems by William Carlos Williams. The poems and illustrations are very child friendly. It has an informative introduction about the life of Williams. “The Fool’s Song” was used in this unit.

Worth, Valerie. *All the Small Poems and Fourteen More*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1994.

This is a nice little book of small poems from Worth. By researching this unit I came across this book and used “mushroom.” The book contains a variety of styles of poems but all are short and fairly simple.

Supplemental Sources

Certo, Janine L. “Cold Plums and the Old Men in the Water: Let Children Read and Write ‘Great’ Poetry.”

International Reading Association. Vol. 58, No. 3, November 2004.

This article was read just for background knowledge and information concerning teaching poetry in the classroom.

Llewellyn, Kim. “Celebrate National Poetry Month with Shel Silverstein.” *Shel Silverstein.com*. 2004. Harper Collins. 8 Apr. 2006. <<http://www.shelsilverstein.com/pdf/classroom.pdf>>.

This is a great resource to use when you want to use Shel Silverstein poetry. It gives easy steps of how to use specific poems to teach specific elements of poetry. The lesson on rhyme was inspired by this website.

Myers, M. Priscilla. “Passion for Poetry.” *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*. December 1997/January 1998: 262-272.

This article was read just for background knowledge of teaching poetry in the classroom.

Singer, Marilyn. “A Blast of Poetry.” *School Library Journal*. V50 N9.

This article was read just for background knowledge of teaching poetry in the classroom.