

Unit Plan Title: An Introduction to Poetry

Framework: Romantic

Target Age: 14-16

Unit Length: 2 to 6 weeks

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Description Lesson Plan:

This unit offers students a chance to explore the medium of poetry as a way to express their emotions in writing. Multiple poets and styles of poetry are examined to offer students various inspiration and understanding of poetry as a functional personal art form. Through this unit students will connect with their own creativity.

Cognitive Tools used:

Heroic Quality, Narrative, Image, Extremes and Limits, Collections and Hobbies, Connection to Hopes and Fears, Change of Context, Revolt and Ideology, Literate Eye, Sense of Wonder, Embryonic Philosophic, Somatic (Rhythm, Incongruity) and Mythic (Binary Opposites, Metaphors, Jokes and Humour)

Keywords:

Poetry, Writing, Poet, Self-Expression, Creativity

1. Identifying “heroic” qualities

What heroic human qualities are central to the topic? What emotional images do they evoke? What within the topic can best evoke wonder?

Main Heroic Quality: Empowerment

Alternative Quality: Creativity

Images that show these qualities:

Envision having something really important to say, but when you come to say it, nothing comes out. You feel completely paralyzed because those around you cannot hear you at all. Unable to communicate your ideas, you realize you are equipped with a whole host of words and vocabulary; which when arranged, rearranged and manipulated produce messages to help reclaim your voice.

2. Shaping the lesson or unit

Teaching shares some features with news reporting. Just as the reporter’s aim is to select and shape events to bring out clearly their meaning and emotional importance for readers or listeners, so your aim as a teacher is to present your topic in a way that engages the emotions and imaginations of your students. To do so, consider which of the following dimensions of your students’ emotional and imaginative lives can be used to shape your lesson or unit—all related to the skills the good reporter works with:

2.1. Finding the story or narrative:

What’s “the story” on the topic? How can the narrative illustrate the heroic qualities of the topic?

Bitter Beleaguered Betty is a frustrated 16-year-old teenager who feels imprisoned living under her parents’ strict rules at home. She feels like she is under house arrest, as she cannot hang out with some of her closest friends after school. Betty constantly argues with her mother, Demanding Diane, and her father, Strict Steve, who have high expectations for her. To make matters worse, Betty is having a difficult time in some of her classes, including English, and recently expressed some of her frustrations and concerns in her diary:

Date: August 15, 2010

Dear Diary:

Forever trapped and caught in a sea of conflict
Resisting the rules and regulations that imprison me
Eager to break free from the chains and shackles that
Enclose and bind me to the rigidity of everyday life
Determined to reclaim *my* voice and finally be heard
Opposed to being silenced
Mitigated and oppressed

My mom and dad are driving me absolutely nuts these days, mom especially. If I had enough money I'd definitely move out, and I've told them that, too. For some reason they just don't understand I'm not a baby anymore, and they need to start letting me make my own decisions. I don't understand why everything always has to be their way or the highway. I don't have a say in any of the decisions they make, including my curfew. I couldn't believe it, I walked in the house at 8:30pm the other day, and the two of them were sitting at the kitchen table waiting to have a 'chat' with me. It's absolutely ridiculous! It's not like I was two hours late, it was only half an hour and they completely lost their cool with me. When I tried to explain why I was late they weren't even willing to listen and told me that the next time I was late coming home, I would lose all of my privileges and wouldn't be allowed to hang out with my friends, period! I don't get it, they say they trust me, but their actions don't show this at all. Not to mention, they expect me to do all the chores the minute I get home from school. They say I need to get my priorities straight, but I think it's the dumbest thing ever. After a long and exhausting day at school, the last thing I want to do is vacuum the house, empty the garbage, take out the recycling, and wash the bathroom.

Plus, they won't even let me decorate my walls how I would like. Where's my freedom of expression? Clearly, it's not in this house. My room's so boring when I compare it to my other friends' walls that are covered in pictures and posters. I can't even express myself in my own bedroom, go figure. And then there's the whole wardrobe thing. I'm not allowed to wear clothes that are too revealing dad tells me. If he had it his way, I'd be going to school dressed in a turtleneck every day. I really don't think they understand what it's like to be me, otherwise they'd begin to see how unreasonable they're being. Anytime I try to voice myself they accuse me of talking back and tell me to drop my attitude wherever I got it from. Even worse, they blame my friends for my so-called "attitude," which I don't appreciate one bit.

So if things weren't bad enough at home, school's also a drag. For the past month, we've been working on writing different types of essays and learning the structure of them. As is, there are a bunch of grammar rules I need to follow, including proper sentence structure, punctuation, capitalization and spelling. Writing essays reminds me of having to follow rules at home. It's so confining. How can teachers expect me to be creative and express myself when they tell me exactly how to write an essay? The structure of an essay has been drilled into me, starting with the introductory paragraph that must contain a thesis statement. Then there are the 3 body paragraphs that must support your argument, and the concluding paragraph. Within each paragraph, you must also have a topic sentence with at least 3 supporting details and a concluding sentence. And we must follow the rules of formal writing too, which means we can't use contractions, slang, or clichés even though it's obvious to the reader what we're trying to say.

I guess that's why I like poetry. It's much more liberating and creative. I can say whatever I want, however I want to since there aren't any exact rules to follow, unless I choose to write a certain type of poem. But even then, it's up to me whether I want to write a haiku, an ode, limerick, cinquain, biopoem or free verse poem. The options are vast, and all of the poetic devices I can choose from are endless. I really like to use similes and metaphors because they help me express how I'm feeling in relation to another experience or object. For example, on one occasion I really needed to vent, so I compared my built up anger and rage to a volcano ready to erupt at any given time. But the beauty of it all is that I don't have to use them if I don't want to, unlike writing an essay where I am bound to a certain format. For me, poetry is liberating and a way for me to reclaim my voice. I usually sit in my room after a heated argument with my mom and dad to let out my frustrations, concerns and disappointments. As a teenager who feels silenced at home and at school where I am supposed to conform to the standards and rules, poetry helps

me convey my emotions and reclaim parts of me that have been denied. Who knows, maybe one of these days mom and dad will truly understand how I feel about their rules and living at home if I share some of my poetry with them. Perhaps this will get my point across loud and clear! There's so much I can't say in person, or want to say but know I can't without being punished, so for now I'll continue to take all of my negative energy and use it in more constructive ways instead of blowing up at my parents since I know it won't get me anywhere.

All in all, poetry is pretty neat because the messages I convey along with its form and structure can take on different styles. Sometimes there are huge gaps on the page, words that may not make sense to the reader, but make perfect sense to the author. I like the fact that I don't have to justify what I've written or answer any questions I don't want to. It's great, since it allows me to communicate exactly what I'm thinking or feeling at the time.

2.2. Finding extremes and limits:

What aspects of the topic expose extremes of experience or limits of reality? What is most exotic, bizarre or strange about the topic?

-Beowulf is the oldest surviving epic poem that was written in Old English—the language of the Saxons. Only 30,000 lines of Anglo-Saxon poetry remains, most importantly, Beowulf. It was composed sometime in the 4th century, and was passed from generation to generation by word of mouth. Packed with action, and a history of festering pride, drunken violence, spies, bloody borders, raids, drinking, and gift-giving, Beowulf is about a hero who becomes the leader of his people. Beowulf has origins in the pagan era, but, surprisingly, no one can trace the original author of this masterpiece.

-Concrete poetry is sometimes not considered to be poetry because it is image based; the poem and its meaning come in through the eye not the ear. It puts the responsibility for the meaning on the shape and look of the word itself, not just using the word as an “indifferent” carrier of meaning. What do you think? Is visual poetry art or poetry? Where do they cross-over?

-e. e. cummings has written about the difference between poets and “mostpeople” in his Poetics. Sometimes poets and writers can write a poetics that describes the context of their writing, and their relationship to their choices regarding form, vocabulary and tone. Sometimes they can use their poetics to describe why poetry is useful, or how it is affecting human history and consciousness.

After reading cummings on “mostpeople” what do you think? Is there a difference between poets and “mostpeople?” As you write your own poetry in this unit keep track of some of your choices to see if you find any patterns. You will use these understandings to create your own “poetic.”

You can find his poetic on mostpeople vs. poets as an introduction to a book of his poems here:

<http://www.americanpoems.com/poets/eecummings/11928>

The last lines of this piece read “Always a beautiful answer who asks a more beautiful question.” What makes a beautiful question?

-Alan Ginsberg is one of the American Beat poets. In 1955 he wrote a piece called “Howl” which is now considered to be one of the seminal works by the beat poets. It was originally a performance piece, but then was published by the famous bookstore in San Francisco, City Lights. When Howl was written it was considered obscene, and the man who published it was even arrested and charged. What is happening when a poem moves from being considered obscene to being highly prized and celebrated? Howl appears to be a long unstructured rant, but if you look again, you see a clear structure. How could we describe this structure? If you were going to “howl,” what kind of structure would you use? In a timed writing exercise of one hour, everyone will use a structure that you predetermine and then howl a long poem modeled after this one.

-A new kind of poetry has emerged with the Internet. It's called cyberpoetry or hyperpoetry. It is digital poetry that exploits the possibility of compressing time and space on the internet. Because of this shift in form, it is very

different from traditional poetry. Digital poetry is often multimedia, including images and sound. Hyperpoetry uses hyperlinks, so the poem has no set order. What does this do to the traditional idea of poetry's form and function? Find examples of digital poetry online. Create a digital poem, somehow leveraging the power of the computer or the internet to create meaning from form. Now create a text version of the same poem. Share each version with a small group and have your listeners tell you the difference; what is lost or gained in the different mediums?

2.3. Finding connections to human hopes, fears, and passions:

To what human hopes, fears, and passions does the topic connect? What ideals and/or challenges to conventions are evident in the content? Through what human emotions can students access the topic?

An impressive poet and playwright, William Shakespeare, whose exact date of birth is a mystery, wrote a total of 37 plays and 154 sonnets over the course of his career. His popular sonnets are referred to as the Shakespearean sonnet for their unique style and form. All but 3 of his sonnets follow the exact same structure consisting of three four-line stanzas, followed by a final couplet in the following pattern: abab cdcd efef gg. The entire poem is written in iambic pentameter meaning every single line contains 10 syllables and alternates between accented and unaccented syllables.

Like Betty, many poets use poetry to express their feelings and the struggles in their lives. Poetry can be used to express the indescribable emotions that are buried underneath our experiences. Sylvia Plath is credited with popularizing a genre called *confessional poetry* which might be something like what our heroine, Betty, wants to do. Confessional poetry talks about all of the things that would normally be concealed by society; aspects of family, personality, love affairs...lots of the juicy stuff. Ginsberg is also considered a confessional poet. Plath's themes are very personal, and she uses a small set of symbols to build a personal language to describe her own life. In examining her poems, see if you can find her key symbols and link them to her themes. Once you have this list, think about your own life. What might your own key symbols and images be?

2.4. Employing additional cognitive tools of Romantic understanding:

What kinds of activities might you design to deploy other tools in your students' cognitive toolkits? Consider the following:

Collections and hobbies: *What parts of the topic can students explore in exhaustive detail? What activity might engage students in learning everything they can about some aspect of the topic?*

- Choose one poet that writes about their own feelings and struggles, like Betty wants to do. Use the titles of all of their poems to create your own poem.
 - Collect the images and symbols you would need to write your own confessional poetry like Sylvia Plath.
 - In a group, choose an abstract noun and have a timed contest to see who in your group can come up with the most metaphors for that noun.
 - Find 5 poems that connect directly to your own life experience.
 - Use advertising (street signs, commercials etc.) to collect "found poems"
 - How many forms of poetry can you find? Can they be further categorized in any way? A preliminary list can be found here: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Poetic_form or here: http://www.poemofquotes.com/articles/poetry_forms.php
- 7) Find (or invent) at least one "unlisted" kind of poetry.

Change of context: *What kinds of activities could change the context in the classroom? How might drama or role-play be employed or how might students engage the body's senses in learning?*

To appreciate the use of the 5 senses employed in poetry, students will experience certain senses at heightened sensations on a nature walk. Students will first lose their ability to see as they are blindfolded and then lose their sense of hearing as their ears are plugged. In turn, students will have to rely on their other senses to describe their

surroundings, which they otherwise might have neglected, since we tend to rely on our sense of sight and vision to make sense of the world.

Think about what you know about form. Is there a form that works best for each genre? Take your notes from your nature walk and create a series of poems in different forms. Give your collection a title by thinking about what unites them, or what distinguishes them. Find a way to have your collection express the sensory foundation of the poems.

Have students act out their similes and metaphors that draw upon comparisons. Create gestural dance by finding a single gesture for each metaphor in a poem. Memorize the poem and do the gestural sequence at the same time.

The literate eye: *How could graphs, lists, flowcharts or other visual formats be employed in learning about the topic?*

Include a multi-sensory graphic organizer for the 5 senses in which students go outside (perhaps to a forest or pond) and evoke their 5 senses. They will then describe and record everything they see, feel, hear, touch, and smell. Afterwards, they use their descriptors to create a piece or a series of poetry.

The students can engage in an activity where they create a series of words on magnets in small groups. They give their set to another small group whose task is to create as many poems as they can that appeal to the 5 senses and employ as many literary devices as possible. The poems can take on any style or form, as students are encouraged to see the ways in which words can be manipulated to produce wondrous pieces of art. They must rearrange magnets containing different words on them to create an assortment of poems. When creating the words, the group will have to imagine some challenge in their set that the other group will have to work around, for instance, there may be only a few nouns that repeat, or no instance of the word "is".

Brainstorm and create a web of literary devices drawing parallels between their function and use in poetry. (i.e.: Similes / Metaphors = Comparative terms, Symbol/ Personification = Representational terms, Paradox/ Oxymoron = Contrasting terms). See how many associations there are between different poetic devices. Students can then decide which poetic device is most engaging to them, do they like repetition, rhyme, image, metaphor...? They can then personify that device and enact conversations amongst themselves in little skits with characters who speak only in those devices.

The sense of wonder: *What kind of activity might evoke students' sense of wonder? How could you use that sense of wonder to draw students forward in thinking about further dimensions of the topic?*

How does poetry have the ability to evoke such a range of emotional responses? It's fascinating that poetry can make people laugh, cry, giggle, shiver, hurt, reminisce, smile, identify with others, wish and dream in addition to several other feelings. In addition, isn't it amazing that poetry speaks to people of all different ages, races, cultures, genders, ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds, and intellectual abilities? Regardless of distance, poetry unites individuals and groups of people around the world.

In silence, have the students eat an apple (or other food) each. They can then use their knowledge of form, style and device to write poems about their experience. Afterwards, have a class discussion about how the poems were different or the same. Why or why not?

Revolt and Ideology: *What ideals or challenges to the norm are evident within the topic? Are there examples within the topic that exemplify an ideal or revolt against perceived unfair rules or limitations?*

Hip hop and spoken word is not widely considered to be poetry. In fact, throughout history lyrics have sometimes been considered poetry and at other times not. Is there a difference between music lyrics and poetry? What might that difference be? Hip hop is not considered poetry even though it uses rhyme, meter, and many of the same

devices as traditional poetry. But it comes from an oral tradition within a literate culture. Listen to examples of hip hop and spoken word. Is it poetry or not? How can you decide? What is the definition of poetry according to the class? Is it possible to agree?

Embryonic tools of philosophic understanding: *Consider how to frame the topic in terms of a general idea or theory. How can students begin to move from the particular aspects of what they have been learning to a more general explanation? How can students' sense of agency be engaged?*

Poetry is a medium that is distinct in its style and form, and allows individuals to convey their thoughts and ideas creatively. It is particularly empowering for those who have been traditionally marginalized and rendered voiceless. Poetry allows those who have been silenced to reclaim their voices, as they can freely express their thoughts, opinions, feelings, ideas and emotions. With this emphasis on poetry and personal expression how, then do we evaluate poetry? How can we say one is better than another? (question for discussion?)

Throughout this unit, students are asked to examine from many angles the question of what poetry *is*. Through writing, discussion, activity and reading, at the end of this unit they will be able to debate with each other the merits of different pieces of poetry. As an embryonic philosophic activity, have the students on small teams or in pairs and give them "surprise" poems. They will engage in debate with another team about whether the piece is poetry and why it is important to the writer, to the reader, and to the world.

2.5. Drawing on tools of previous kinds of understanding:

Somatic Understanding: *How might students use some of the toolkit of Somatic Understanding in learning the topic? How might their senses, emotions, humor, musicality, and so on, be deployed?*

Pattern and Rhythm of Movement:

Listen to hip hop music. How do the words fit on the beat? What creates that effect? Can it be created without the beat? Have students write rhythmic poetry, and then write while listening to a hip hop beat. Later, have a conversation about whether the beat influences the poem.

Incongruity:

Take the driest piece of writing that each student can find, whether its a tax form, the phone book or a TV guide. Have them use glue and scissors to create poetry from that form. Later, discuss, is there poetry in everything? In anything? What blocks poetry? How do we find it? How do we liberate poetry, and what happens to us when we do so?

Mythic understanding – *How might students use some of the toolkit of Mythic Understanding in learning the topic? How might abstract and affective binary oppositions, metaphor, vivid mental imagery, puzzles and sense of mystery, and so on, be deployed?*

Binary Opposites: Confinement/ Liberation

Metaphors:

Have students look up metaphors for poetry written by poets. Once they have a collection of these, they can make up their own.

Poetry is a mural ready for you to paint and create.

Poetry is a caged bird being released

Rhyme, and rhythm of Spoken Language:

Sing "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean" and have students alternate between sitting and standing every time they hear a word that starts with the letter "B" in the song. This is a link to a poetic device called alliteration. Have

students choose other devices and teach the class to see them, by somehow using the body to highlight the device when the poem is recited.

My **Bonnie** lies over the ocean
My **Bonnie** lies over the sea
My **Bonnie** lies over the ocean
Oh **bring back** my **Bonnie** to me

REFRAIN:

Bring back, bring back
Bring back my **Bonnie** to me, to me
Bring back, bring back
Bring back my **Bonnie** to me

Last night as I lay on my pillow
Last night as I lay on my **bed**
Last night as I lay on my pillow
I dreamed that my **Bonnie** was dead

REFRAIN:

Bring back, bring back
Bring back my **Bonnie** to me, to me
Bring back, bring back
Bring back my **Bonnie** to me

Oh **blow** the winds o'er the ocean
And **blow** the winds o'er the sea
Oh **blow** the winds o'er the ocean
And **bring back** my **Bonnie** to me

REFRAIN:

Bring back, bring back
Bring back my **Bonnie** to me, to me
Bring back, bring back
Bring back my **Bonnie** to me

The winds have **blown** over the ocean
The winds have **blown** over the sea
The winds have **blown** over the ocean
And **brought back** my **Bonnie** to me

REFRAIN:

Bring back, bring back
Bring back my **Bonnie** to me, to me
Bring back, bring back
Bring back my **Bonnie** to me

Jokes and Humor:

Question: What is a simile?

Answer: It's like a metaphor

Question: How do poets say hello?

Answer: Hey, haven't we metaphor?

Question: Why did the boy poet introduce himself to the girl poet?

Answer: Because he wanted to meter.

Question: How does a poet sneeze?

Answer: Haiku!!!

Why was John Keats always hounded by creditors?

Answer: Because he Ode so much.

Actual Similes and Metaphors used in High School Students' Essays:

- Her face was a perfect oval, like a circle that had its two sides gently compressed by a Thigh Master.
- His thoughts tumbled in his head, making and breaking alliances like underpants in a dryer without Cling Free.
- She grew on him like she was a colony of E. Coli, and he was room-temperature Canadian beef.
- She had a deep, throaty, genuine laugh, like that sound a dog makes just before it throws up.
- Her vocabulary was as bad as, like, whatever.
- Her hair glistened in the rain like a nose hair after a sneeze.
- They lived in a typical suburban neighborhood with picket fences that resembled Nancy Kerrigan's teeth.
- The ballerina rose gracefully en pointe and extended one slender leg behind her, like a dog at a fire hydrant.
- He was deeply in love. When she spoke, he thought he heard bells, as if she were a garbage truck backing up.

3. Resources

<http://writingenglish.wordpress.com/2006/09/12/the-25-funniest-analogies-collected-by-high-school-english-teachers/>

<http://www.poetryfountain.com/jokes.html>

<http://www.gigglepoetry.com/poetryclass.aspx>

http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/voice/voice069.shtml

book: Rules for the Dance by Mary Oliver

4. Conclusion

How does the narrative end? How can one best bring the topic to a satisfactory closure and how can students feel this satisfaction? Alternatively, what new questions can draw students to think more deeply about the topic? How can you extend students' sense of wonder?

Although Bitter Betty isn't quite ready to approach her parents to reveal some of the poems she has written, she continues to use poetry as an outlet to voice her frustrations. She begins to learn other poetic forms to increase her poetry repertoire and write different types of poems, including: ballads, free verse, haikus, limericks, lyrics, narratives, and sonnets. Betty feels liberated escaping the realities of her everyday life as she finds her voice from within that has been suppressed.

There is a shift from being silenced to being heard: poetry allows us to voice our innermost thoughts and feelings. Instead of being silenced or keeping these emotions bottled inside, they are freely expressed.

5. Evaluation

How can one know that the content has been learned and understood and has engaged and stimulated students' imaginations?

Staging a poetry slam:

Students will carefully select a poem written by a poet of their choice and take on the persona of the poet. This requires them to consider and understand the personality traits of the poet, including the time period in which they lived. They will then create their own props/costumes based on their perception of the poet, and perform their selected poem as though they are the poet. Students are encouraged to consider how they will establish the mood and tone of the poem, paying attention to lighting, music and the props they include. Ultimately, the goal is for them to imitate the personalities of the poet, as they convey the emotion and sentiments the poet was trying to convey when they wrote the poem.

In preparation for the poetry slam, the classroom can be transformed into a vintage coffeehouse to simulate the actual experience. Students will then read their selections aloud to the rest of the class. Alternatively, students may also share their own poems that they have written.