

Lesson Plan

SYNESTHESIA: LITERARY DEVICE



<http://www.wassily-kandinsky.org/Composition-VII.jsp>

Author, artist, and T&W writer-in-residence [Liz Arnold](#) offers this lesson to explore the concept of [synesthesia](#) as a literary device. Students explore work by Jimi Hendrix and [Arthur Rimbaud](#) to inform their individual poems.

Grade(s): 5th, 7th

Genre(s): Poetry

Common Core Standards: (Refer to the Anchor Standards for Writing at [English Language Arts Standards > Writing > Grade 5](#) and [English Language Arts Standards > Writing > Grade 7](#))

- ELA- LITERACY.W.5.3.D
Use concrete words and phrases and sensory details to convey experiences and events precisely.
- ELA- LITERACY.7.4.4
Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, incl. figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

- ELA- LITERACY.W.7.3.D
Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events.

Guiding Questions:

- What is the effect of describing something common and every day, like vowels, in such heightened language? Does it change the way we think of them?
- What would jealousy or hunger taste, sound, or look like?
- What is the sound or smell of sadness?
- What is the texture of pride?
- Overall, why is synesthesia a useful literary device?

LESSON

Introduction:

Define synesthesia as a “sensation produced in one modality when a stimulus is applied to another modality, as when the hearing of a certain sound induces the visualization of a certain color.” Students first listen to [audio of Jimi Hendrix, “Bold as Love,”](#) while following along by reading the [lyrics](#). As students listen, ask them to think about the different senses mentioned that are associated with colors.

Discuss what students heard and their thoughts, using the SMARTboard or whiteboard to list examples of synesthesia from the audio as a reference when they write their own poem.

Main Activity:

Read Arthur Rimbaud’s poem “Vowel”:

A Black, E white, I red, U green, O blue : vowels,
I shall tell, one day, of your mysterious origins:
A, black velvety jacket of brilliant flies
Which buzz around cruel smells,
Gulfs of shadow; E, whiteness of vapours and of tents,
Lances of proud glaciers, white kings, shivers of cow-parsley;
I, purples, spat blood, smile of beautiful lips
In anger or in the raptures of penitence;
U, waves, divine shudderings of viridian seas,
The peace of pastures dotted with animals, the peace of the
furrows
Which alchemy prints on broad studious foreheads;
O, sublime Trumpet full of strange piercing sounds,
Silences crossed by Worlds and by Angels:
O the Omega, the violet ray of Her Eyes!

Discuss how Rimbaud uses synesthesia to combine senses and the imagery that the poem evokes. Use the third and fourth line to start the conversation: “A, black velvety jacket of brilliant flies which buzz around cruel smells” and ask students what senses are used to paint a picture of flies. Ask students how the use of synesthesia adds to their understanding of the poem. Continue the discussion by having students choose lines to discuss that also uses senses and imagery.

At the end of the conversation, have students think about topics to assign colors to such as: different weather types (rain, sunny, sleet, snow), numbers, food groups, months of the year, kinds of animals, or any other topics they are interested in. Once they have brainstormed imagery for feelings and colors in their own poem, they can write a first draft of their poem.

Closing:

Have students read poems out loud to allow them to hear each other’s work and to help students understand synesthesia through auditory learning.

Materials: Computer, projector or SMARTboard, copies of the Rimbaud poem

Vocabulary: Synesthesia, stimulus, modality, poetic devices

Multi-Modal Approaches to Learning: This lesson engages **auditory** learners, listening to the audio of Jimi Hendrix’s song, “Bold as Love”; using an original poem as a source to inform writing; listening to Rimbaud’s poem read aloud; **intrapersonal** learners, time spent independently writing; and **interpersonal** learners, sharing poems and giving feedback with peers.