

LESSON PLAN

Recipe for a Simple Start

Poem of the Week

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Objective: To develop a daily practice of using poetry in the classroom that will build student competence in reading comprehension and in drawing inferences from written material.

Applicable Age/Grade Level: This method is applicable to all age groups and grade levels.

Anticipated Time: One poem per week, five to ten minutes daily.

Materials/Resources Needed: A selection of poems to be reproduced as small, individual handouts for students, a sheet of chart paper, Post-it notes.

Process Overview

The Poem of the Week practice will work best if initiated at the beginning of the school year and continued weekly. Once the class is accustomed to the process, the discussions can become as short as just five minutes a day, though they may take a bit longer at the beginning.

Preparation

Select a poem for the week, approximately ten to fifteen lines. To find poems that are thematically and linguistically appropriate for the age/grade level you

are teaching, you can visit the websites of Teachers & Writers Collaborative, Ted Kooser's American Life in Poetry, Billy Collins' Poetry 180, Poetry Out Loud, the American Academy of Poets, and The Poetry Foundation, among other resources. Include poetry written by young people as well, so that students can have models written by their peers. One recommended source for wonderful poetry by young writers is Richard Lewis' anthology *Miracles* (Simon & Schuster, 1984). You can also access the annual Scholastic student writing anthologies for examples.

Create a handout of the poem, rather than having students read it in a book. This permits a closer connection and takes the poem out of its expected environment, isolating it for deeper inspection.

Create a projection or interactive whiteboard file with the poem, if the technology is available.

Day One

Ask the class to read the poem on the handout twice silently. Read the poem aloud to the class once as students read along, then invite them to read it aloud with you.

On a piece of chart paper hung in a consistent, easy-to-reach location, create a "Vocabulary Parking Lot." Have students place Post-it notes with the words used in the poem that they do not know writ-

ten on them. This can be used as part or all of the week's vocabulary list. Discuss the words or assign students to find definitions in a way that suits the classroom need and timing. Encourage students to review the "parking lot" throughout the week to see if they have struggled with the same words as others, or if they can define any of the words for the class.

Day Two

Read the poem aloud to the class again, while the students read along from the handout or from the board. Ask one or two students also to read the poem aloud.

Ask students to identify parts of speech and other phonemic aspects in the poem. For instance, start the discussion by asking students to find the nouns that they recognize in the poem. Continue to locate verbs, pronouns, articles, etc. This is an opportunity to engage in a brief discussion of the meaning of the vocabulary "parking lot" words.

Day Three

Have a student read the poem aloud to the class again, while the others read it on the handout.

Ask students to identify and discuss aspects of the poem that illustrate literary elements, such as figurative language and form. You can start by asking students to point out descriptive language in the poem, or how sound is used through techniques such as alliteration, assonance, consonance, rhyme, etc, or what sensory details are employed within the poem to "paint the picture" for the reader.

Day Four

Have another student read the poem aloud to the class again, while the class reads it on the handout.

Start a short discussion regarding the theme of the poem, what students think the poet is asking them to believe, and how they feel about the poet's viewpoint. Allow differing points of view to be expressed

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and explained, helping students to recognize the subjective potential of a poem as a work of art.

Day Five

Have another student read the poem aloud to the class again, while the class reads it on the handout, purely for enjoyment.

Engage the students in a short discussion of their responses and interpretations of the poem now that they have experienced it from many different angles, as well as having read and heard it multiple times throughout the week. Ask students how their impressions of the poem have changed since the first reading on Day One.

Note: Although for this process I recommend selecting shorter poems to help keep the daily discussion brief, students will be able to apply what they learn here to develop more sophisticated responses when they examine longer poems.

Expected Outcomes

- Develops stronger vocabulary.
- Increases reading comprehension.
- Strengthens critical-thinking skills through inquiry-based examination of poems.
- Increases competency in addressing abstract thought and metaphor in order to draw inference from the content.
- Creates greater familiarity with a variety of poets and styles of writing.
- Teaches students to support each other in learning, sharing ideas and concepts, and strengthening writing skills.