

Marsha Waldman – English Lesson Plan

Spoken Word

Poetry Appreciation, Creative Writing, Performance

Overview

In this activity, students are introduced to contemporary trends in poetry and spoken word performance by watching selections from “Brave New Voices.” Using Raymond Carver’s poem “Fear” as an example, they write emotion catalog poems collaboratively and then individually. Through a writer’s workshop exercise, they learn how to improve word choice and create more powerful imagery. They apply these skills to their own poems. Then, after studying spoken word performances, they celebrate with their own poetry slam.



Rationale

Many students have difficulty relating to poetry, considering it irrelevant to their lives and difficult to understand. “Brave New Voices” is a national teen poetry slam competition. Exposing students to carefully selected performances that are about issues and experiences that they can share, enables them to make a connection and appreciate poetry as a living art. Once they have made that connection, they are better prepared to appreciate poetry more broadly. It is also important that students have the opportunity to practice presenting in front of their peers, so that they gain experience and confidence in this essential skill.

Student Objectives

Students will:

- Listen to, read, analyze and write poetry;
- Recognize, discuss and employ the poetic techniques employed in poems;
- Analyze the techniques used by performance artists; and
- Perform their own poems.

Instructional Plan

Resources

- Selected videos from “Brave New Voices”
 - Copies of “Fear” by Raymond Carter with student examples*
 - Copies of Emotion Catalog Poem Checklist
 - Copies of “She did what?” Worksheet
- *Note: parts of this lesson are based on a “Read, Write, Think” lesson plan and include resources from that website.

Preparation

- Students have learned the definitions of poetic technique and figurative language such as imagery, rhythm, rhyme, tone, mood, etc.

Instruction and Activities

Session One

1. Students view a series of “Brave New Voices” poetry performances.
2. They discuss the meaning of each poem.
3. They discuss the use of poetic technique in each poem.

Session Two

1. Students watch the video of an emotion catalog poem “Tourettes” and analyze the structure of the poem.
2. Students read the poem “Fear” by Raymond Carter and analyze its structure making note of particular techniques such as rhythm, repetition, irony, tension, etc.
3. As a whole class, students brainstorm different emotions they experience and might write about.
4. Students work in small groups of three or four creating emotion catalog poems.
5. Groups share their poems.
6. At home, each student writes an emotion catalog poem.

Session Three

1. Four students are selected to act out walking into the room in different ways: march, sneak, skip, rush. Their classmates have to guess what they are doing. The teacher records on the board the list verbs they generate and explains how each of these words carries more specific meaning than the neutral word “walk.”
2. Students complete the “She did what...?” worksheet, stopping to share and discussion examples of their work.
3. Students apply what they have learned to their own poems, creating more concrete and vivid imagery. The teacher provides feedback and suggestions as they work.

Session Four

1. Students review two “Brave New Voices” videos and identify effective performance technique such as varied pacing and volume, eye contact, and selective use of gestures.
2. Students work with partners or in small groups to make final revisions to their poems and practice reciting.

Session Five

Students perform their poems for their classmates.

Extensions

Students write more poems of their own.

Student Assessment/Reflections

Each student produces an emotion catalog poem that includes vivid, descriptive images and that includes a “twist” at the end of the poem that conveys the key message of the poem. Each student stands before the class speaking loudly and clearly while maintaining eye contact with the audience.

NY State ELA Standards

Standard 2: Language for Literary Response and Expression

1. Listening and reading for literary response involves comprehending, interpreting, and critiquing imaginative texts in every medium, drawing on personal experiences and knowledge to understand the text, and recognizing the social, historical and cultural features of the text.

Students:

- identify the distinguishing features of different literary genres, periods and traditions and use those features to interpret the work
- recognize and understand the significance of a wide range of literary elements and techniques, (including figurative language, imagery, allegory, irony, blank verse, symbolism, stream-of-consciousness) and use those elements to interpret the work
- understand how multiple levels of meaning are conveyed in a text
- Interpret and respond to texts and performances from a variety of genres, authors, and subjects
- Respond to authors’ reading and discussing their works

2. Speaking and writing for literary response involves presenting interpretations, analyses, and reactions to the content and language of a text. Speaking and writing for literary expression involves producing imaginative texts that use language and text structures that are inventive and often multilayered.

Students:

- Write original literary texts
 - use elements of literary text, such as plot, character, setting, dialogue, conflict, and suspense, to engage the reader
 - maintain consistent point of view, including first-person, third-person, or omniscient narrator
 - create a personal voice
- Use resources such as personal experience, knowledge from other content areas, and independent reading to create literary, interpretive, and responsive texts

Resources:

Fear - By Raymond Carver

Fear of seeing a police car pull into the drive.
Fear of falling asleep at night.
Fear of not falling asleep.
Fear of the past rising up.
Fear of the present taking flight.
Fear of the telephone that rings in the dead of night.
Fear of electrical storms.
Fear of the cleaning woman who has a spot on her cheek!
Fear of dogs I've been told won't bite.
Fear of anxiety!
Fear of having to identify the body of a dead friend.
Fear of running out of money.
Fear of having too much, though people will not believe this.
Fear of psychological profiles.
Fear of being late and fear of arriving before anyone else.
Fear of my children's handwriting on envelopes.
Fear they'll die before I do, and I'll feel guilty.
Fear of having to live with my mother in her old age, and mine.
Fear of confusion.
Fear this day will end on an unhappy note.
Fear of waking up to find you gone.
Fear of not loving and fear of not loving enough.
Fear that what I love will prove lethal to those I love.
Fear of death.
Fear of living too long.
Fear of death.

I've said that.

Emotion Catalog Poem Checklist

Be sure that

- your poem offers 12-25 lines that illuminate the emotion.
- each line begins in the same way, until you reach the ending.
- each line is vivid and descriptive, presenting one clear image.
- each word is chosen carefully and means precisely what you intend it to mean.
- the ending offers a sort of "twist" that expresses the ultimate essence of the poem.
- there is an overall rhythm to the poem that allows it to flow when read aloud.
- the title of the poem is the emotion which is its subject.
- the final draft is carefully proofread with all errors in spelling, grammar, and mechanics corrected.

Sample Student Poems

Joy

Joy of food
Joy of Fridays
Joy of being first
Joy of snow days
Joy of soft sheets
Joy of sleep
Joy of getting a job
Joy of being paid
Joy of buying something you want
Joy of listening to music
Joy of playing hackysack
Joy of dancing on stage
Joy of pretty girls (and good-looking guys)
Joy of that second your parents leave
Joy of taking a chance
Joy of hanging out with people who mean the most
Joy of living one day at a time

Yeah, that kind of joy
Joy of living
Of just being me.

Fear

Fear of knowing the danger
Fear of falling
Fear of the worst case scenario
Fear of what the doctor says
Fear of many months of healing
Fear of the unstable ankle
Fear of stepping back on your board
Fear of doing it again
Fear of everyone watching
Fear of knowing the possibilities out there
Fear of should I hold on or should I bail
Fear of fear.

Student Emotion Catalog Poems

“To Make You Happy”

By Alexa

I'll make you happy like the elderly woman placing flowers in a vase that has been empty since her children left home.

I'll make you happy like the exhausted warrior seeing the white flag of an enemy waving.

I'll make you happy like the insomniac drifting into a deep sleep.

I'll make you happy like that “after” woman in the weight loss ad.

I'll make you happy like the newly weds buying light bulbs together for the first time.

I'll make you happy like the fragile child choosing the right star to wish on.

I'll make you happy the the one they all under estimated who is now signing autographs.

I'll make you happy like the girl who's getting nothing she asked for but everything she wanted.

I'll make you happy like the blind boy knowing of the moon's true beauty.

I'll make you happy like the friend waiting for you with an umbrella in the downpour.

I'll make you happy like the graffiti artist with a red can of paint and a naked wall.

I'll make you happy like a poet with a blank page of potential.

I'll make you happy like...

Wait.

Did you ever try to make me happy?

No. Oh.

I'll forgive you...

If it would make you happy.

“Confidence”

By Chris

Confidence to take that last minute shot
Confidence to see the future and stand my ground,
Confidence to get out on the field and do my best,
Confidence to ask the teacher questions,
Confidence in the people around me,
Confidence to play sports with the best,
Confidence to just let things be how they are,
Confidence to reject bad influences in my life,
Confidence to speak my mind,
Confidence in losing and winning
Confidence to look others in the eye and be myself,
Confidence to know what I like and what I don't,
Confidence to take the first step in life,
Confidence to look within for the answers,
Confidence to prove myself and all that I can be,
Confidence to never give up.