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Leaving, Longing, and Left Behind: Poems of Home

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Introduction and Rationale

My students come from many countries. Some arrive a few days before they join my class. Some have been in America for several years. But all share the common experience of leaving one homeland and learning to adapt to and adopt another. Having grown up in Texas, then lived much of my adult life in Canada, I share their heightened interest in the concept of home. The poems we study in this unit explore three aspects of home: leaving the familiar, remembering, and being the one left behind.

In terms of poetic craft, this unit focuses on concreteness and metaphor. Poetic devices such as assonance, consonance, anaphora, end stopping, enjambment, meter and rhythm, and various forms are also introduced through the poems. Many poems center on objects, often described in concrete detail. I want students to see that poetry is grounded in the real; I also want them to make the leap to metaphor that strong poems engender. Twin culminations of each section are an essay and a poem the student writes which illustrate her understanding both of the prominence of image, and of the depths to be gained through metaphor. Linking theme and craft through an experience that is central to their lives engages students' interest and encourages them to grow both intellectually and emotionally.

Who is the Unit Designed For?

This unit is especially suitable for high school students who have experienced disruption in their lives. Whether through divorce, immigration, or moving to follow a parent's job, most of our students have felt the emotions depicted by the poets. Seniors who anticipate the end of their high school careers may also be captured by these poems. Giving non-immigrant students the opportunity to share the emotions of leaving home with their fellow students who have left their homes thousands of miles behind, is an added benefit of the unit. I have found that building empathy among diverse populations of students smoothes the teacher's path by countering cliques and infighting, and by enhancing the students' sense of belonging and well-being.

My ESOL (English as a Second or Other Language) students range in age from 15 to 19, and are at an

intermediate level of English fluency. They are enrolled in sheltered ESOL classes for all their core content, including my English class. Our school, Englewood High School in Jacksonville, Florida, is an urban high school with about 2000 students in grades 9 through 12. We are an ESOL center for the Duval County School District, and house about 700 ESOL students.

Background My Students Bring to the Unit

My students this spring spoke 11 languages and came from 18 countries, and entered the classroom with a profound appreciation of poetry. I begin the course by informally reading poems from their countries to build a sense of the value and commonality of poetic expression. Students were moved by a poem about two lovers who were killed on a bridge in Sarajevo. Students from Afghanistan were proud to read a Rumi poem with their classmates. A Senegalese student was thrilled to share that the founder of his country, Léopold Senghor, was a well-recognized poet. By the time we get to the unit on poems of home, students have a common appreciation for each other's countries' culture as well as for the value of poetry. Beginning with honoring their own traditions builds students' willingness to appreciate poetry in English.

Goals and Objectives

My goals are that by the end of this unit each student

1. will improve their English language skills;
2. will enjoy reading and analyzing poetry;
3. will acquire basic vocabulary and techniques for analyzing poetry;
4. will be able to brainstorm, write, edit, and revise a literary essay;
5. will have had a positive experience writing in poetic form;
6. will feel a sense of accomplishment and pride in their written work.

My objectives to measure the accomplishment of these goals are that each student

1. will have ample opportunities to read, write, listen to, and speak English in class each day;
2. will read ten or more interesting and well-crafted poems several times;
3. will complete activities designed to enhance the understanding and enjoyment of the poems;
4. will complete and turn in four literary essays, including brainstorming notes, first draft, peer editing notes, revised draft, and final draft;
5. will peer edit four essays by each of three colleagues for accuracy, clarity, and power, and turn in signature evidence of twelve editing experiences;
6. will complete and turn in three poems, including brainstorming notes, first draft, peer editing notes, revised draft, and final draft;
7. will peer edit three poems by each of three colleagues, and turn in signature evidence of nine editing experiences;

8. will compile their favorite poems, three short essays, culminating essay, and own revised poems in a small bound volume;
9. will present a brief oral presentation introducing their bound volume to their classmates;
10. will publicly read one of their own poems to an evening gathering including family members and school officials, if possible.

Correlation to Standards

The outcomes of this unit correlate to five of the seven national English standards as outlined by the Sunshine State Standards combined with the New Standards Performance Standards from the National Council for Economics and Education. The unit partially meets the E1 READING standard that students "read four books… or from one genre." Students read at least 10 poems. Teachers can supplement this unit with additional poems to further meet this standard. The unit meets several portions of the E2 WRITING standard, with students drafting and editing four essays and three poems. The specific standards covered are: "produces a response to literature," "produces a narrative account," "produces a persuasive essay," and "produces a reflective essay." Teachers using the unit have plenty of leeway to assign specific types of essays or poems to meet these standards as needed. Standard E3 SPEAKING, LISTENING, AND VIEWING is a focus of this unit, with an emphasis on group work, peer critiquing, and presentation of poems. The specific standards referenced are "one-to-one conference," "participates in group activities," and "prepares and delivers a presentation." Students meet most of E4 CONVENTIONS, GRAMMAR, AND USAGE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE through several writing and editing exercises. Within the limits of ESOL realities, the standards of "demonstrates control of the English language," and "able to proofread and revise" are addressed if not fully realized. The fifth standard, E5 LITERATURE, is the thematic focus of the unit. The student "produces at least one literary genre," namely poetry, and meets the poetry component of "responds to all types of literature."

ESOL Classroom Strategies

I teach in a computer lab, an unusual setting for an ESOL English class, but with advantages. Every student has his own computer, so drafting and revising goes fairly quickly. Students also have ready access to the Internet for research. The overhead projection system linked to the teacher computer is useful for group brainstorming. Throughout the unit I refer to techniques I use regularly in my ESOL classroom. Here's a quick explanation of those techniques, with a little advice thrown in for good measure.

Groups

In ESOL classrooms the main behavior problem is chattering in the native language. A rule of thumb is to mix cultures and languages in group composition. The exception would be a beginning English-learner who would be paired with a same language speaker for translations. Grouping by pairs and threes avoids having two Spanish speaking students together in a larger group. I don't use formal tasks (recorder, etc), as groups in my lessons are quickly formed and dissolved.

Student Presentations

Speaking is an important goal for ESOL students. Being allowed not to speak is also an important consideration for any student with less than two years of English training. For public presentations, start with assigning students to speak in front of the whole class, then back down to speaking aloud for the teacher privately if the student is truly uncomfortable. Try to have a product for the student to hold in his hands and point to as he speaks, for example a poster or a small object. If a presentation is worth for example ten points, any other student who is not respectful of the speaker loses one point off her own presentation mark. Rustling papers, whispering to a neighbor, shifting in her chair, or tapping a pencil would all be considered disrespectful. After a few deductions, students learn to listen quietly to each other.

Brainstorming

A couple of years ago I bought several small white boards, about 2 feet by 3 feet, from Wal-Mart. Office Depot, Staples, and Office Max also carry white boards, or Lowe's or Home Depot will cut white board material to size. Students write their group brainstorming results on the board and can easily and quickly share them with the class. They like working in several colors. So far the novelty hasn't worn off, and we avoid the down-time of all waiting while someone puts her work on the board or overhead.

Learning to Find Supporting Details

Illustrating literature, either as detailed scenes or as cartoons of plot, motivates students to read for detail, a skill they badly need for standardized exams. A bonus is student perception that you are giving them a "fun day." An elaboration of this technique is to have students cite passages from the text on the illustration, for example with Yeats' poem in this unit, putting the words "hive for the honeybee" right next to the drawing of the hive. This activity also introduces students to the idea of using textual citations in later essays.

Essay Writing

ESOL students appreciate knowing that standardized writing tests are easier to pass if you give the reader *more* than the standard three concrete details per paragraph. What marker is going to fail a student who loads their paper with good supporting details? Detail is the easiest part of essay writing, and also one of the most important. This advice is not meant to minimize the importance of good organization and clear sentences, but details can help lift a weaker ESOL paper up to a passing mark, and a mid-range paper up to a good mark.

I try to give literature students a relatively free choice of essay topic during a unit. In fact, every student must come up with a substantially different essay topic. They write on assigned topics often enough in practice essays for writing exams, and I like their experience of the unit to be more pleasant. Some advantages are reduced cheating, a more varied peer editing experience, and more interest for the teacher marking the essays.

A lesson I learned this Spring is to watch out for Internet translating engines when working with ESOL students. A student can write the essay in their native language and use a website to translate it into English. You need to watch your students closely as they write and type their essays *inclass*. Beware the student who dawdles in class and promises to finish the essay at home!

Creative Writing

If you expect students to write and share poems, you *must* create a demonstrably safe environment. A

supportive environment for writing and sharing poetry includes designating the classroom as a No-Put-Down-Zone. Any student in my class who makes a gratuitously negative comment must immediately give their maligned classmate three genuine compliments. Also, criticism needs to be specific and helpful. "That's not a very good line" doesn't do anything but hurt someone's feelings. "Maybe you could start this line with a verb instead of an adjective" might actually help the poet improve the poem. Students should talk from their own experience whenever possible. "I had a problem like this with my poem and I fixed it by…" puts the poet at ease by sharing a difficulty, and also offers concrete advice. Remind everyone in the room that we are all trying to become better poets, not better rippers-apart-of-poems. Lastly, remind your poets that they don't need to take anyone's advice. Each student owns his or her own poem. A good rule of thumb is that if several people make the same suggestion, the poet should probably give it careful consideration. But if everyone has a different opinion, the poet's preference automatically wins.

Poem Studying Strategies

Analyzing a Poem

We begin the study of a poem with two or more readings by myself or volunteer students, followed by a brief discussion of the surface meaning: What does the poem say on initial reading? The second question for discussion of each poem is, What is the poet really saying? Here we look for added understanding, for example questioning whether the poet is perhaps speaking ironically. We may also look at the historical context of the poem, whether the poet is speaking from a persona, what other poems we might compare this poem to, etc. Last we look at craft, asking how the poet creates the overall impression of the poem, visual and auditory, and how that impression relates to the subject matter of the poem. We may also talk about how students might use techniques in their own poems.

Assonance

Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds. An example occurs in lines three and four of Natasha Trethewey's poem, with the 'o' vowel sound, "the pine woods roll by, and counts on one hand / dead possum along the road, crows in splotches" [underlining mine]. The lines also illustrate the difference between visual and audible assonance; though all the words contain the letter 'O,' the sound of the vowel changes. ESOL students need to be especially alert to enunciation, and these two lines can lead to a whole discussion on varying vowel sounds in English. Recognizing, writing about, and utilizing assonance will lift student papers and poems above the norm.

Alliteration and Consonance

Alliteration is the repetition of the same consonant sound in close proximity. A less familiar but highly effective device is consonance, the grouping of similarly formed consonant sounds. *Poetic Designs* by Stephen Adams offers a clear explanation of how our mouths make sounds. The consonants can be grouped according to the location of lips, teeth and tongue as they are said aloud. A partial list includes: plosives ñ P and B; dentals ñ T and D and TH; sibilants ñ S and SH and Z; nasals ñ M and N and NG; fricatives ñ F and V; and gutturals ñ G and K. Poets often use consonants from the same group to create euphony (harmony) or from different groups to create cacophony (dissonance). Here's an example of euphony from Shakespeare, using fricatives to suggest pathos. Note also the assonance with 'O.'

- I am a very foolish fond old man,
- Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less;... [underlining mine].
- Here's an example of cacophony, also from Shakespeare, suggesting turmoil,
- Were they not forc'd with those that should be ours,...

Students can learn both to recognize and write about consonance in poems, and also to use consonance deliberately in their own poems.

Rhythm and Meter

Normally, the heart beats at a casual iambic pace. Iambic is soft-HARD-soft-HARD-soft-HARD and is the natural pacing of speech and thinking. In times of stress, the heart can pound with a spondee beat. Spondee is HARD-HARD-HARD-HARD. Iambic pentameter, a familiar poetic meter, consists of five iambic feet per line, often explained as the length of a comfortable breath. You can find a good discussion of all the different feet and their combinations into lines in Chapter 4 of *The Art of Writing Poetry* by William Packard. The ballad stanza is examined with the Dickinson poem in this unit.

Poets move in and out of meter in order to create rhythm. Poets using a specific meter for reference often begin with a line or two that exactly fit the meter, to let the reader know the pattern they will be deviating from and returning to. Then they begin to vary the pattern. Why not stick with a steady meter? Songs stick pretty much to meter, why not poetry? Music has variations in pitch and tone and instruments, and poems just have a few vowels and consonants to play with... plus rhythm! Just as with rhyme, the poet may also use a deviation from strict meter to call extra attention to a particular word.

You may want to give students a double-spaced copy of a poem from the unit and have them work through the metrical patterns line by line. Be aware that this isn't easy even for graduate students in creative writing (!), and that different interpretations are natural. Students may find it easier to clap out the meter and listen to how the words weave around the hand claps. The main point here, and I'm happy if students get this much, is that meter is the pattern, and rhythm comes from moving in and out of the meter. For a full discussion of meter and rhythm, see *Poetic Designs*.

Rhyme

Various types and reasons for rhyme are covered in Lesson Plan 1, using the example of Ralph Waldo Emerson's "I Am an Exile from my Home; Heavily." *Poetic Designs* also offers an extensive explanation of rhyme.

End Stopping and Enjambment

A poet end stops a line by finishing a thought, phrase, or sentence, at the end of the line. Enjambment involves carrying the thought over the line end. A full discussion occurs in Lesson Plan 2, using the example of Judith Ortiz Cofer's "El Olvido (Según las Madres)." You can find a clear explanation of line break traditions and rationale in *Poetic Designs*.

Unit Strategies

Timeline

This unit can take place over several weeks, for example three hours per week for ten weeks, with a total time commitment of about thirty hours. Students need to reflect upon and digest the poems over time. Teachers with less time can of course pick and chose among the unit activities. Optional additional activities are also included in some sections. In each section students brainstorm, write, peer edit, and revise one short essay (300 to 500 words) and one poem, for a total of three short essays and three poems. Spending about half an hour on each poem analysis leaves about four class hours per section for writing activities.

As a brief overview, section one deals with the topic of leaving home, focusing on literal poems of leave-taking. In terms of craft, we focus on sonnet form, assonance, consonance, concrete images, and fairly straightforward metaphors. In section two we study poems in which the poet looks back on his home from a distance, poems which closely mirror my students' current situation. The style elements we focus on include various types of rhyme, exploiting multiple word meanings in poems, iambic pentameter, rhythm and meter, free verse, and enjambment. In section three, we read and study poems from the point of view of the person left behind. Students learn about anaphora, and study a progression in the poems from concrete details, to simple metaphor, to controlling metaphor. Next, students consolidate their learning from the unit in a long essay, approximately 1000 words. Students analyze a topic of their choice, using several poems we have studied and one other 'home' poem of their own finding. Last, students collect their chosen poems, revised essays, and own revised poems in a small bound volume.

Content

The first section of the unit deals with the topic of leaving home. The first two poems feature young women leaving their familiar and presumably beloved homes, a situation many of my immigrant students have experienced. In the third poem a man imagines his journey's end in glowing detail. This poem challenges my students to compare their imaginings of America with the reality they have found here.

The section begins with Natasha Trethewey's "Signs, Oakvale, Mississippi, 1941," a poem students immediately enjoy for its vivid imagery and for its clear narrative. In Trethewey's poem, a young woman leaves home for the first time with a man who drives a "fine car." As they travel down Highway 49, she superstitiously counts the roadside omens she sees. Students can begin their 'serious study' of poetry by simply listing either in discussion or on paper the many concrete images (signs) in the poem. The underlying meaning of this poem, which students grasp immediately, is that the young woman is worried about whether she has made the right decision. In class one day, a student speculated angrily about what the young woman's family must think, which led to a thoughtful discussion of the ambivalent emotions and ethics of striking out independently, providing an excellent beginning to this whole unit.

Trethewey's poem also offers generous material for the study of poetic craft. In a carefully designed Shakespearean sonnet, the poet follows the contemporary sonnet practice of enjambment, disguising her rhyming line endings until they melt into the fabric of the narrative. Students are surprised when we go back and look at the ends of the lines, and find such straight rhymes as "luck" and "tuck," and "farm" and "alarm." As an activity, they can use this poem to discover for themselves the abab cdcd efef gg Shakespearean sonnet rhyme scheme. Rhythmically, this poem is sophisticated and difficult and probably not the best venue

to begin discussing iambic pentameter. I'd focus instead on sound qualities, introducing the concept of assonance. An example occurs in lines three and four with the 'o' vowel sound, "the pine woods roll by, and counts on one hand / dead possum along the road, crows in splotches" [underlining mine], giving the reader the feeling of rolling movement, and also a first hint of ominousness. You can also point out the difference between visual and audible assonance; though all the words contain the letter 'O,' the sound of the vowel changes. ESOL students need to be especially alert to enunciation, and these two lines can lead to a whole discussion on varying vowel sounds in English.

The second poem in this section is Gwendolyn Brooks' "my dreams, my works, must wait till after hell." On a surface level, a woman (first person narrator rather than the limited third person point of view in the Trethewey poem, probably worth noting to the class), is leaving home. Again students can enumerate the many concrete details the poet gives us. Looking deeper, the poem begins and ends with the image of bread and honey, Brooks' metaphor for the home she is leaving. Students easily grasp that when Brooks speaks of bread and honey, she is actually talking about all the comforting aspects of a familiar home. That both are nourishing food items can lead to a discussion of nurturing, and of how food often takes on the metaphor of nourishment both in everyday conversation and in literature. For example, we bring "chicken soup" to someone who is sick, even if what we bring isn't really chicken soup. Students may also want to discuss the religious symbolism of bread, or manna, and discuss why the narrator might be leaving home for a sojourn in "hell." Perhaps the poet envisions a return to religious roots with her hope at the end of the poem that, "My taste will not have turned insensitive / To honey and bread old purity could love."

In terms of form, Brooks' poem is a departure from the traditional sonnet. Students can look for a rhyme scheme like that in the Trethewey poem. They will soon find vestiges of the abab pattern, but not a complete sonnet form, leading to a discussion of how a poet uses form and departure from form to create meaning. You could begin to talk about iambic pentameter here, as the first four lines are fairly easily scanned. For example the first line can be read:

/ / / / /

I hold my honey and I store my bread

The slightly unnatural stress on the word "and" can lead to further discussion of how poets use conventions such as meter but often feel free to innovate for whatever reason they choose. I'd leave a discussion of meter versus rhythm for later in the unit, when students are more familiar with recognizing regular metrical patterns. I also wouldn't go beyond line four of this poem for discussing iambic pentameter, as Brooks gets creative in line five with four strong beats, and line six with six strong beats. You might want to notice with the class that she does return to fairly regular iambic pentameter for the last three lines of the poem, as well as to a (sort of) rhyming couplet for the last two lines, a fairly common poetic method for giving the reader a sense of closure at the end of a poem.

The last poem in this section is William Butler Yeats' famous "The Lake Isle of Innisfree." The poem doesn't fit the pattern of leaving a familiar home for uncharted territory, but instead introduces the topic of expectations, a topic we return to later. Students begin by making notes on white boards about what they expected to find in America. We share the notes in discussion and come up with a list of common expectations on the overhead or computer projection screen. Next we read the Yeats poem several times, first simply enjoying the sound of the language, and then beginning to notice specific images. Students can then list images either individually or in groups, or perhaps as a whole class exercise. We also discuss unfamiliar vocabulary, such as "wattles" and "linnet." Students may work in groups to draw a picture of Yeats' image of Innisfree, leading

directly to one of the essay suggestions at the end of this section.

On a craft level, I would use this poem to consolidate an understanding of end rhyme and of assonance. Students can easily find the rhyme scheme abab cdcd efef. The class can discuss why this poem is not a sonnet, and if they already know the ballad form, you can also discuss why it is not a ballad. If students aren't already familiar with ballads, I wouldn't confuse the issue by introducing them with a not-ballad! The poem is also full of examples of assonance, which students can identify and share with their colleagues. If students begin to notice the recurrence of consonants, you can introduce the concept of consonance. Poetic devices the student "discovers" will linger in the memory far longer than those introduced on a vocabulary page.

The essay students write for this section may reflect the themes and/or the craft of the section. For example, a gifted student might choose to write about how the use of poetic devices in Yeats's poem contributes to a deeper understanding of the poem. A challenged student may choose a simpler topic, for example something already discussed in class. Students can also work in groups by poem to brainstorm details they can use in their papers. Another relatively simple essay would be to use the artwork created for Yeats' poem to generate details for a paragraph, perhaps comparing the poem to the student's own expectations of a new place. My expectation for junior and senior students is that this will be a literary essay, though for younger learners or less fluent English-learners, writing informally about their own experience of leaving home may be appropriate.

For their own poem, students choose a familiar object from their homeland, perhaps something they brought with them and can bring into class, and write about it, focusing on details and moving perhaps into metaphor if they choose. Following the example in the Brooks poem, they may choose to write about a familiar food or meal. In terms of form, a gifted student may wish to attempt a sonnet, or to imitate one of the authors studied. A simpler assignment would be to give students a template, or a starter line. The teacher's focus in encouragement and eventual evaluation should be on the wealth of detail the student brings into the poem.

In the second section of the unit we study poems in which the poet looks back on his home from a distance, poems which closely mirror the ESOL students' current situation. We begin with a poem in which the narrator looks sadly toward home. The poem combines images and abstractions, and shows a transition toward free verse which provides a platform for discussing form. The next poem is ripe with images of a left-behind homeland which resonates with many of my students, and provides a straightforward model for emulation. The last poem in this section raises the question of what would you find if you did go home. The contrast of rosy memory versus harsher reality should provoke thought and discussion, and perhaps some interesting student poems.

The first poem in this section, Ralph Waldo Emerson's "I Am an Exile from my Home; Heavily," is the subject of Lesson Plan 1 in this unit. The second poem in this section, Judith Ortiz Cofer's "El Olvido (Según las Madres)," is the subject of Lesson Plan 2. The final poem in this section, T'ao Ch'ien's "Returning to My Old Home," raises the question of what you would find if you did go home. Begin by asking ESOL students what they think their homeland is like now. This should be a voluntary activity. A student from the Sudan, for example, may find it too painful to share thoughts about relatives still in Darfur. Some, for example students from Afghanistan and Iraq, may be able and willing to share insights into the changes in their countries. Encourage students to talk about what their country was like when they left, and what they would expect to find if they went back. Then read T'ao Ch'ien's poem several times. As with most other poems in this unit, the surface meaning isn't hard to figure out. An old man goes home after many years and sees that the fields remain but the houses are gone and many neighbors are dead. The second half of the poem is philosophical, with the old man thinking

about time passing and his own death. Students will enjoy the ending, when he decides, "A little wine still brings me to life." If the class includes Asian students, they may be able to explain the references to Eastern religion. I couldn't find out exactly what the "Great Transformation" is, perhaps a political upheaval in ancient China. "Ch'i" is the life energy that circulates through the body. A lovely and fun bit of rhetoric is "hot and cold" as a symbol for summer and winter. As a translation, the style is more the craft of the translator than that of the poet, so I don't discuss poetic sound devices in this poem.

Essay topics for this section again reflect the themes and/or the craft of the section. Students may choose one poem and talk about at least three aspects of that poem, for example the theme of remembering, how an example of multiple word meanings in the poem supports the theme, and how a single word might represent more than one of their own memories of their native country. They might want to pick three poems and talk about one aspect of poetry as it occurs in all three poems, for example rhyme in three poems, or what memory of homeland means in three poems. They might choose to write about memories of home in two poems, and relate those to their own memories. They might even want to interview a relative and write about memories illustrated in one poem, their own memories, and the memories of that relative.

For their own poem, I ask students to bring in, instead of an object, a photograph or piece of artwork that in some way represents their native country. They can find an image on the Internet as a last resort, though a personal item will probably inspire a more thoughtful effort. The poem may describe the art, or may be a narrative inspired in some way by the art. Encourage students to experiment with rhyme, or if they are inveterate rhymers, encourage them to experiment without rhyme. Encourage them to try some specific meter and see if they can work with and against it to create rhythm. I also allow them to simply write whatever feels right, and hope that the lessons of the section have informed their subconscious. Practicing poets often find they have to let go of specific goals in order to produce a satisfying poem. My only requirements are that the poem be grounded in concrete images, and that it deal in some way with memories of home.

In section three, we read and study poems from the point of view of the person left behind. The four poems demonstrate the universality of sadness at being left behind, and are also the most sophisticated stylistically. The first poem uses a wealth of details and introduces the rhetorical device of anaphora; the next poem creates a new metaphoric image in each stanza; and the third poem carries a single controlling metaphor throughout the poem. The last poem gives the thoughts of a man who first pouts, then imagines himself with his absent friends, and finally realizes that he can find what he needs right where he is. In terms of style, this culminating section of poems provides a platform for discussing metaphor, which students will then model in their own poems.

The first poem in this section is Muriel Rukeyser's wonderful "Waiting for Icarus." A recording of Rukeyser reading the poem is available on the CD that accompanies the book *Poetry Speaks*. Students immediately grasp the surface meaning, that while she waits for him to come back, Icarus' girlfriend remembers all the things he told her before he took off, what the morning was like, and the boyfriend-advice her mother gave her. Students may need to be told or reminded of the Icarus legend. A good account can be found at http://thanasis.com/icarus.htm. Students can be assigned to find details in the poem that help them understand the relationship between Icarus and the narrator, between Icarus and his father, and between the narrator and her mother. They can discuss and/or make notes of details that would let a reader know what their own relationship to someone is like. These notes might eventually lead to an interesting poem.

Another avenue for discussion lies in the poem's final lines; "I would have liked to try those wings myself. / It

would have been better than this." Knowing the end of the story of Icarus, students can discuss under what circumstances risking is better than waiting. Some who took risks to emigrate may be willing to share the story of leaving their native country. They may also want to talk about frustrations, either difficulties in their native country that led them to leave (much like Icarus), or frustrations of waiting for a better life now that they are in America (somewhat like the narrator). A personal example would be a student of mine whose mother was a lawyer in Chile and is now working as a teacher aide while she tries to save up enough money to move out of public housing.

The poetic technique of the poem that jumps out at the reader is anaphora. The repetition conveys the impression of someone trying hard to convince themselves. An interesting activity would be to ask students to make a list of arguments they might use to convince themselves of something, for example to study for an exam the next day, or to finish a homework assignment. You could also brainstorm a list of arguments on the board, and then have students use anaphora to reformat them into a class poem. Another poetic device worth mentioning in this poem is the use of end stopped lines. Rather than enjambing the lines, Rukeyser chooses to put a complete thought on each line. She also chooses not to put periods at the ends of the lines, except for the last stanza. You can ask students to speculate why she might have made these choices. I have no pat answers other than that the end stopping enables the anaphora, but students may come up with more interesting speculations.

The second poem in this section is "If You Were Coming in the Fall," by Emily Dickinson. On the surface, Dickinson writes of the uncertainty of waiting for someone's return. Much of the beauty and poetic interest of the poem lies in the memorable metaphors for time that she creates in each stanza. In the first stanza, she compares a brief wait to brushing away a fly. The second stanza compares a wait of months to winding yarn in a ball. She counts centuries on her fingers in the third stanza, and would toss time away "like a rind" if she could be certain of an afterlife in stanza four. In the final stanza, she compares uncertainty to waiting for the sting of a "goblin bee."

A fun way to introduce the poem would be, before reading it, to ask students to fill in a chart with the headings, "very small things," "middle-sized things," "large things," and "gigantic things." They should list about ten things in each column. Then they could create their own metaphors for the passage of different amounts of time using the columns they've brainstormed. A prompt might be, "How long is a minute? An hour? A day? Your whole life?" When students have finished creating and sharing their metaphors, you can read the poem several times and enjoy Dickinson's images.

On a technical note, the "Van Diemen's land" in stanza three is the historical name for the Australian island of Tasmania. Van Diemen's Land was the main penal colony in Australia from 1803 to 1853, when transportation of felons was outlawed (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Van_Diemen's_Land). The lines "Subtracting till my fingers dropped / Into Van Diemen's land" take on an even more ominous tone when you realize she writes of dropping her fingers, the metaphoric centuries (already a rather grisly image), like felons into prison. Children played a game involving Van Diemen's land, so the image may not be so terrible, but reference to the game doesn't seem to explain why the fingers "drop" (http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/cs6/fall.html). The "goblin bee" of the last line is not a scientific kind of bee, but rather a bee which is like a small, scary monster. You may want to ask students to differentiate images in the poem which suggest waiting as a not too unpleasant thing, for example a fly or balls of yarn, from images of waiting that are distressing. They can also create more and less painful images of waiting for themselves, perhaps to use later in their own poem.

Stylistically this poem provides an opportunity to talk about the ballad stanza, which alternates lines of four strong stresses with lines of three strong stresses (iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter). Students may be familiar with this pattern from popular hymns. In fact, this poem can be sung to the tune of "Amazing Grace" (with comical results). You can find a rather tinny rendition of the tune without words at http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/a/m/amazgrac.htm. The music starts as soon as you open the site. Students should be so adept with rhyme by now that they quickly point out that only every second line rhymes. Lots of fun things can be done to explore the ballad stanza. Students can work in groups to create a country love song, adhering to both meter and rhyme scheme, about a love who goes away, again using the tune of "Amazing Grace." An interesting note is that while poets often vary iambic pentameter freely to create rhythm, ballad meter tends to be more strictly adhered to, perhaps because it already offers variety of line lengths.

The third poem in this section is Sylvia Plath's "The Rival." Plath extends the metaphor of the absent love as similar to the moon throughout the poem, giving us a poetic progression from concrete details, to metaphors by stanza, to overarching metaphor. Beginning by looking for surface meaning, students need to pay attention to the last stanza, "No day is safe without news of you, / Walking about in Africa maybe, but thinking of me." The one fact we know from the poem is that the "rival" is not present with the narrator. The rest of the poem gives concrete details about the absent person ñ the identify remains ambiguous ñ as well as about the narrator's feelings are toward that person.

Students in pairs can begin their analysis by looking for specific citations and conclusions about the "rival," for example that he or she smokes, deduced from "looking for cigarettes." Another example would be that the "rival" sends the narrator unpleasant letters: "Your dissatisfactions, on the other hand, / Arrive through the mailslot…." Next students can look for quotes that directly give the narrator's attitude toward the "rival." An example would be "beautiful, but annihilating." Third, ask students to list all the references to the moon in the poem. Then students should make notes in a parallel column on how the "rival" resembles the moon. The groups can then each report one of their findings, so that everyone can find and appreciate all the instances of the extended metaphor. Students can also speculate about what kind of rival the narrator describes. Is the moon in the poem a rival of the sun? Is the "rival" another writer? Is he or she a competitor for someone's love? The poem and the poet's life provide no clear answers. Students may notice that in this poem the narrator seems glad to have been left behind. In the first two poems, the narrator waited more or less patiently for the return of a loved one. In "The Rival," the reader can easily imagine that the narrator hopes the absent person never comes back.

The final poem in this section, and of the unit, presents a third view of being left behind. In "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," Samuel Taylor Coleridge laments the absence of his friends as they take a walk without him. One obvious difference from the other poems is that his friends aren't gone for long; another and more significant difference is that he ends up deciding that where he sits waiting for them is just as interesting as where they are. At least on a surface level, he ends the poem quite content to have been left behind. The circumstances of the poem are interesting and kind of fun. Coleridge's wife Sara, with whom he was having marital difficulties, one morning upended a pot of boiling milk on his foot. The accident prevented him from going for a walk with friends, including Charles Lamb who is mentioned in the poem. The poem opens with Coleridge (no need to call him the narrator when he so clearly identifies himself) pouting as he sits under a lime tree. Feeling sorry for himself, he describes the trail his friends are taking in gloomy terms. The mood switches in the second stanza, when he begins to feel happy that his friend Charles is out of the city (ironically, Charles himself felt more comfortable in London) and enjoying the beautiful, no longer gloomy, sights along the walk. A third transition comes when Coleridge looks around his "little lime-tree bower" and

realizes that everything he needs to appreciate nature is right there. He ends the poem remorseful for having pouted in the first place, and sending good wishes to his friend Charles.

This long and complicated poem will benefit from several readings, with frequent pauses to clarify. A good activity to help students understand what is going on, and to encourage them to find details in the poem, is to have them work in small groups to draw a four panel cartoon of the 'plot' as outlined above. As a longer activity, they can put quotes from the poem onto the drawings to justify the concrete details. My ambitions for high school students for this poem don't go far beyond straightforward enjoyment. If they understand the story and appreciate the twists Coleridge's mind meanders through, I'm happy. The language is endlessly rich, and by this time at the end of the unit I would encourage students to appreciate and to share whatever poetic devices they find. In fact, an educational "test" could be to have students find and identify twenty poetic devices in the poem. Students may also naturally think of and want to talk about loved ones left behind in their native country. This poem may help them think of those loved ones as content, especially if they hadn't wanted to leave in the first place.

As a personal growth medium, this poem can launch a discussion of how much attitude matters. When he is gloomy, Coleridge pictures the trees as "unsunn'd and damp," surrounded by "the dark green file of long lank weeds." When his mood lightens, all of a sudden the water is a "smooth clear blue," and instead of the weeds, he focuses on the "purple heath-flowers." Another interesting exercise would be to have students describe a scene, perhaps from a landscape photograph or painting or even the classroom, imagining themselves in different moods: happy, sad, angry, remorseful, etc. The key to the exercise is that by choosing concrete details that reinforce a given emotion, they are in essence creating or at least acknowledging metaphors.

This unit section raises many possibilities for essays. On the third time through this essay-writing exercise, students should be able to create a topic for themselves that falls within the general guidelines for literary essays. If your curriculum specifies that students must practice a certain kind of essay, those restrictions can certainly be applied here. A couple of ideas would be to look at the use of metaphor in three poems, certainly a focus of this section, or to write about differing attitudes toward being left behind. As before, students might also choose to write about several aspects of one poem that has particularly captured them. Watch out for Internet crib notes, as all four poets are considered masters and have been written about extensively.

For their own poem, again many possibilities arise from this section of the unit. The Dickinson and Rukeyser poems lend themselves to imitation, at least in the devices of anaphora and metaphor by stanza. Students may also have some good notes from a class exercise that they wish to build into a poem. Remind students that their poems should be grounded in concrete details. If they can lift the images in the poem into the realm of metaphor, what an accomplishment! Once again, students can play with meter and rhythm, with rhyming, assonance, and consonance, and with enjambment and end stopping.

After studying all the poems, students write a longer essay, approximately 1000 words, analyzing a topic of their choice, using several poems we have studied and one other related poem of their own finding. Students can imagine breaking the 1000 word essay into essentially two or three shorter essays. If students write about 11 paragraphs of about 100 words each, they will easily fill the length requirement. The key is to find either three related themes with three paragraphs each, or two related themes with four paragraphs each. Add an opening and a closing paragraph, and the student has an essay. A relatively easy example would be to look at metaphor and the theme of remembering, and to pick four poems (one the student finds himself) each of which exemplifies those topics. The student could then structure the essay either by writing about each poem in turn for both topics, or by writing about one topic in all four poems, and then the other topic in all four

poems.

Students need to pick a topic they really care about. Make sure the student creates a plan, filled-in boxes in rows and columns work well, before they start. The essay is not as hard as it is impressive, and the word count in *Word* is a great motivator. My students last Spring worked more diligently to get their 1000 words than they did on any other project of the semester. Plus they were jumping-up-and-down proud when they finished their first drafts. You need to allow four class hours for drafting, one hour for peer editing, and one hour for revising on the computer and printing the revised draft for marking.

To conclude the unit, students collect their favorite poems, short essays, culminating essay, and own revised poems into a small bound volume. Each student picks at least one favorite poem from each section and either types the poem herself or gets a clean copy from the teacher. Each student also makes a final copy of each essay, incorporating the teacher's suggestions from the marked second draft. In addition, each student makes a final copy of each of his own poems. Students who want to include more poems on the theme of home, either their own or ones by a poet they have found, should be encouraged and rewarded. I give bonus marks for extra poems and for especially careful attention to design. You may also want to create a class book incorporating poems and/or essays from each of the students. Try to arrange a public venue for students to read their poems to friends and family and to formally receive their books. At the least, have a lunch at the school and invite school officials to join in congratulating the students. An explanation of the creation of the final book is included in the third lesson plan at the end of this unit.

Materials List

The following items are essential for teaching this unit: blackboard, overhead, or whiteboard to write on; computer with Internet access; copies of the poems specified in the unit (most are available at , an easy to negotiate website).

The following items would be helpful for teaching this unit: CD player to play recordings of poems where available; computer lab so that all students can type and revise essays and access the Internet at the same time.

Lesson Plans

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1. Ralph Waldo Emerson's "I Am an Exile from my Home; Heavily"

The surface meaning of Emerson's poem is quite clear. The first three lines express the narrator's discontent at being far from home. The poem then gives concrete though fanciful details, "The trees the bushes talk to me," and "the small fly that whispers in my ear," for example. Students can begin their analysis by listing the many objects in the poem and discussing, either in groups or by adding notes to their lists, how each object relates to or conveys the author's emotions. They can also list the adjectives and adverbs in the poem, for example "heavily" and "cheerless," that directly express emotion. ESOL students might then brainstorm

together a list of objects from the American environment that make them feel alien, and another of objects they miss from home. Students should save these lists as raw material for the writing assignments at the end of the section.

In terms of craft, Emerson's poem offers a rich playground for learning. Students can once again look at end rhyme, and note that the rhyme jumps around without an obvious pattern. The contrast of the triplet "look," "forsook," and "book," with the doublet "shore" and "ear" can lead to a natural discovery of perfect rhyme and slant or near rhyme. Examining the end rhyme can also lead to a discussion of why the poet might have chosen to rhyme the lines he chose, which leads to an inquiry into the purpose of rhyme. "It sounds good" is a perfectly reasonable answer. An equally reasonable follow-up question is, "Why does it sound good?" With luck and a couple of thoughtful students, you may be able to elicit the comforting memory of childhood songs and stories, and even the utility of rhyme as a memory tool.

You may also want to lead students to see that the poet can give emphasis to a certain concept through rhyme. For example in this poem linking "shore" and "ear" even two lines apart may subtly make the reader remember the sounds of the sea. In the same way, linking "foreign men" with "cheerless fen" shows the narrator's discomfort with *everything* in the foreign land, both the human and the natural environment. Another avenue for learning in the poem is personification, in the talking trees and fly. A third productive path is multiple word meanings, exemplified in "the look / of foreign men" [underlining mine]. What exactly makes the narrator uncomfortable? Is it the way the men look at him, the way the men actually look (as in a photograph), or some other meaning? How would the poem change if the word were "looks"? Were all of these meanings current in Emerson's day? Emerson probably wants the reader to think about several possible meanings at the same time. Remind students of the emphasis Emerson gives the word by putting it at the end of the line, and as part of an insistent rhyme (the formal term for in-your-face). I might even risk a pontificating sentence or two about the powerful economy of poetry.

2. Judith Ortiz Cofer's "El Olvido (Según las Madres)"

Cofer's poem is ripe with images of a left-behind homeland which will resonate with many ESOL students. Rather than mourning the loss of home, however, the poet instead warns of the dangers of forgetting. Students can make a list (again!) of the specific warnings in the poem. They can also brainstorm as a group and compile the fears and warnings of their own parents and grandparents. The poem begins and ends with the words "dangerous thing," and students can discuss why forgetting might be seen as dangerous. Another activity could be to discuss the phrase "die of exposure," looking at the denotative meaning and then speculating on how a person could figuratively "die of exposure" in a room in a city. A final exercise would be to discuss or debate the positive and negative aspects of assimilation. This activity could be expanded into a full-blown lesson if desired.

Stylistically, Cofer's poem is our first example of free verse. Ask students to find the rhyme scheme, which of course isn't there. Then ask students if they can find any sound devices the poet uses to tie the poem together in the absence of rhyme. Some may notice the repetition four times of the word "dangerous" at the beginning and end of the poem, and at the end of two lines. The theme of the poem is certainly danger, and Cofer focuses our attention by repeating the word in prominent places. Another interesting aspect of the poem is the enjambment of the lines. Students could count the number of lines that end in the middle of an idea. Let groups of students pick a given enjambed line and see if they can figure out a reason the poet might have ended the line where she did. For example, in line 11 perhaps she wants us to think of both the meanings of "before," that is 'in front of' as well as 'ahead of in time." Ending line three with "out" makes the reader

wonder for a second what violent thing will be "choke[d]." Sometimes the reason relates to rhythm, for example in line four, where leaving the word "when" hanging at the end adds an extra unexpected beat to the line, jarring the reader into closer attention. Another interesting line break comes in line six, where the line itself reads "your secret name; dangerous…." Though each half goes with another meaning, the reader may subconsciously think that the "secret name" really is "Dangerous!" These speculations are fun, but they also point to the many decisions and opportunities in line endings. Students may choose to play with the line breaks in their own poem at the end of this section.

3. Assemble a Book

The contents of the student book have been detailed at the end of the final section of the unit. These instructions will help you guide students in assembling and binding their volumes. Students in my class have about six hours to put their book together. They need to pace themselves so that they get all the work done. Having a concrete product is a good motivator. Having access to a computer lab obviously makes this section of the unit much easier.

First, students assemble all the pages of their publication in order. If it is possible to get all the pages into a single computer file, students can format the pages to the same style, and can add footers with page numbers. I suggest that students not try to print their book double-sided. I encourage students to go all out on design. If your school has page layout software, such as Microsoft *Publisher*, and anyone in the class knows how to use it, get that student to teach the rest how to design a book cover. Students can look at book layouts from the library and make a copyright page for themselves. They may also want to do a dedication and acknowledgements page. They may want title pages for each section. Encourage them to do whatever they can to make a volume they will be proud to keep. I suggest a spiral binding as that lasts a bit better than coil. Your school or district or a parent may have a binding machine. If not, a couple of dollars a book will get them spiral bound at Office Depot, Staples, or Office Max. Try to talk your principal into paying. The pride students feel from a truly professional product is worth the money.

Finally, arrange a party for the students, kind of like a magazine or book launch if you've ever been to one. Each student reads a small portion from his own book. Family come; school officials stand around looking proud; you may even be able to get a photo into the local paper, which the principal will love. If the local university will host you, hurrah! Invite the professors in the English department. A launch party is a great opportunity for the campus to recruit motivated future students. Somebody needs to provide refreshments, another chance to beg for a few dollars. Students are generally willing to provide food and drinks, but this party should celebrate their accomplishment, and somebody else catering is one more way to honor them.

In summary, I hope you like teaching the unit. I hope your students learn even more than you anticipate. And I hope everybody has a great time at the party. Enjoy!

Annotated Bibliography/Works Cited

Adams, Stephen. *poeticdesigns: an introduction to meters, verse forms, and figures of speech*. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1997.

Adams covers everything, from the most obvious to the most obscure. The writing is straightforward and easy to understand.

Packard, William. *The Art of Writing Poetry: A Guide for Poets, Students, and Readers.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992.

Packard explains complicated poetic concepts in simple terms. The chapters on verse forms and on genres are especially complete. The book includes helpful lists that can easily be expanded into wall charts for the classroom.

Paschen, Elise and Rebekah Presson Mosby. *Poetry Speaks: Hear Great Poets Read Their Works from Tennyson to Plath.* Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks MediaFusion, 2001.

If you buy one poetry book for your class, I would recommend this one, which contains 99 recorded and 210 written poems, as well as interesting essays by contemporary poets.

Trethewey, Natasha. *Domestic Work*. Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 2000.

You may need to buy this book to find Trethewey's poem for this unit. The book is worth every penny. You and your students will enjoy many of this fine young African American poet's poems.

Supplemental Reading List

Brooks, Cleanth and Robert Penn Warren. *Understanding Poetry.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1961.

This book offers an in-depth guide to reading and understanding poems, including many examples and exercises.

Brooks, Gwendolyn. *Gwendolyn Brooks Reading Her Poetry CD*. Caedmon, 2006.

This CD is scheduled for release in January, 2006, and can be pre-ordered through Amazon.com. If your students enjoyed the Brooks poem in this unit, they may be even more inspired by hearing her read her poems.

Perrine, Laurence. *Structure,Sound and Sense: An Introduction to Poetry, Third Edition.* New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1969.

This book gives a thorough explanation of the elements of poetry, divided clearly into chapters by topic, and includes numerous examples and exercises.

Pinsky, Robert. *The Sounds of Poetry: A Brief Guide*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998.

Pinsky examines the subtleties of poetic sound, using interesting, clearly explained examples. Not set up to be a reference volume, this is a short book that you can sit down and read at least a chapter at a time.

Rukeyser, Muriel. *The Life of Poetry.* Paris Press, 1996.

Rukeyser presents a convincing argument for why we need poetry, and why poets need to be active voices within the larger world. This is a book about her poetic beliefs, not a book of poems.

Student Reading List

Natasha Trethewey, "Signs, Oakvale, Mississippi, 1941"

Gwendolyn Brooks, "my dreams, my works, must wait till after hell"

William Butler Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree"

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "I Am an Exile from my Home; Heavily"

Judith Ortiz Cofer, "El Olvido (Segun las Madres)"

T'ao Ch'ien, "Returning to My Old Home" Muriel Rukeyser, "Waiting for Icarus"

Emily Dickinson, "If You Were Coming in the Fall"

Sylvia Plath, "The Rival"

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "This Lime Tree Bower My Prison"

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