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A Curriculum Unit in Poetry for Vocational Students

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Introduction and Rationale

Many teachers feel constraint in choosing to teach poetry beyond core curriculum requirements, partly due to the time limitations imposed by state test preparation. Others perceive the genre to exist in a realm beyond their expertise or understanding, and they steer clear of too much involvement with it. Last, some teachers and curriculum officers may see poetry instruction as a luxury, and not deserving of much instructional time. Poetry, like art and music in many school programs, is often among the first study units to be scaled back.

But instruction in the reading and writing of poetry is in some ways preferable to writing instruction directed toward learning discrete writing skills, such as those required in developing the five-paragraph essay. Whereas traditionally-sanctioned school composition relies on factual support at least, and sustained description at most, the process of creating poetry depends on metaphoric thinking, startling imagery, close attention to the sounds of language, and precision in the choice of words and phrases. These characteristics are critical in the generation of solid writing—poetry or prose; and their absence leaves a reading diet bland and lacking in nourishment. So reading and writing poetry is actually more than an enhancement; it is *essential* in reading and writing instruction.

The intended consumers in this teaching unit are vocational students, whose primary interest in the secondary school setting is preparation for a career in various technical, service and trade occupations. For this reason, the poetry that is selected reflects the people, places, and activities associated with three specific and one general category of careers. The first is for those in service careers, including law and law enforcement, the medical professions, culinary services, cosmetology, technical, computer and office services; and work in the financial services industries. The second category of occupations is blue-collar trade—carpentry, electricity, and engine technology. The third class of career studies is that of computer technology, including hardware, software and networking technologies; and technical drafting. A final category of selected poetry is more generally related to work—that is, it concerns participation in the workforce, or labor as a means of survival and vocation.

What informs this unit is the all-too-real understanding that perhaps the senior and junior years in a vocational school represent the last chance for teachers to immerse students in modes of language that go beyond the pragmatic, and touch the power and beauty of language in the service of art. Even though vocational schools are pretty uniformly directed toward preparing students for stable, high-paying jobs, it is my belief that the

understanding of language and mastery of its operation are the ultimate tools with which to equip the worker!

Objectives

This unit is designed to enable eleventh and twelfth grade vocational students to recognize, to appreciate and to use the features of poetry that are most accessible to them, especially in the generation of their own verse. The goal of the unit is to establish appreciation of poetry by means of exposure to a number of poets who have written poems in a variety of forms on familiar vocation-related subjects and on the theme of work in general. A congruent goal is to provide students with the skills and the opportunity to generate their own poetry, with emphasis on the career areas in which they are involved. The specific foci of lessons in this unit, both in the critical study and the writing of original poems, are: sound devices; imagery involving the five senses; tonal (emotional) concerns; figurative language; rhythm and rhyme patterns suitable to different purposes; and selected poetic forms.

Most vocational high school students are not experienced poets, nor are they for the most part habituated poetry readers. However, many are amateur poets, and most possess the sensibility to learn how to use the fundamental devices employed in poetry at a more sophisticated level. For these reasons, the unit centers instruction on fundamental notions designed to acquaint students with appropriate models, and to encourage production of original verse based on those models.

First, students will identify commonly employed sound devices in poetry when they read, and will be able to choose sounds discriminately for their own poetry. Student poets will identify and use: onomatopoeia, assonance, consonance, and rhyme when effective. Next, they will identify and create selected figures of language, including: metaphor, simile, personification, symbolism, hyperbole and apostrophe.

Of particular relevance to adolescents is the ability to identify tone in poetry, and to have ready tools to help them select words appropriate for their emotional denotation and connotation, when they are generating their own verse. The poignant occasions of a teenager's first experience with death or love, not to mention strong feelings they have about their futures in career-centered schools, are just a few examples of why this particular facet of poetry is uniquely important in this age group.

Students are then shown, by way of some simple scansion exercises, that poets think carefully about rhythmic units. They will practice the production of feet and meter, employing iambs, trochees, anapests and dactyls. Students will also recognize and experiment with free verse.

Students will read, recognize and be able to create poems in free verse, in Shakespearean sonnet form, in American haiku (tercet), rhymed couplets, and a narrative verse form (probably ballad). All of these forms are modeled and students practice them during the course of the unit.

Finally, the notion of imagery is generally perceived by high school students to be a matter of extensive visual description. Consequently, this unit addresses this misapprehension by having students practice the identification and use of images across the five senses. This can be a particularly rich experience for vocational students whose careers are filled with the sights, sounds, smells and tactile experiences endemic to the trades, service industries—particularly the culinary arts—and to the workplace in general.

Strategies

This unit is implemented in two thirty to forty-minute periods (depending on the topic), over fifteen weeks of an eighteen-week semester. (Teachers in schools running traditional schedules could modify the time frame to be implemented over a thirty-week period of time.) The direct instruction and modeling portions of the lessons take place on Mondays, or first day of the week, and the writing instruction portion takes place on Fridays, or the last day of the week. The reason for framing the time this way is that it allows for needed *processing time* during a single week, between the time concepts and examples are introduced, and the time students are asked to use the concepts in their own writing. There are usually assignments given for the Friday class, so there is also time to complete them.

The order in which sub-units are delivered in this unit is based on understandings, beliefs, and my own intuition about poetry, which have developed over thirty-five years of classroom instruction, participation in writing workshops, and reading the writing of pedagogy experts in the field. Key works I have relied on and whose ideas are incorporated into this unit are: Laurence Perrine's ageless book, *Sound and Sense: An Introduction to Poetry* (1982), which has been both useful and inspirational to me for almost forty years; Lewis Turco's, *The Book of Forms: A Handbook of Poetics* (1968), an indispensable book for studying poetic form; two books by Baron Wormser and Dave Cappella, *Teaching the Art of Poetry: The Moves* (2000), and *A Surge of Language: Teaching Poetry Day by Day* (2004), both of which sensitively and intelligently speak to the English teacher on both the rationale and the pragmatics of teaching poetry.

In the analysis of poems, I teach students to follow an explicit protocol. The preliminary consideration is that of sound. Just as if one were dealing with a child beginning to speak, a consideration of sounds and the primitive attachments to the meanings they imply is a fruitful place to begin. The first two weeks look closely at specific sound devices, and students learn to approach any new poem with an ear for the characteristic sounds it makes. The second consideration is rhythm. In the third and fourth weeks, students are directly taught, by way of models and exercises, how to identify common feet and line conventions, so that, as an extension of sound, they search for the fundamental rhythms contained in a poem. Third, during the fifth and sixth weeks, students experience model poems and engage in exercises designed to practice creating figures of language. In the ensuing two weeks, they focus on imagery involving all of the five senses, by means of activities and model study that emphasizes those features. A consideration of technical form is next in this protocol, wherein students look specifically at free and blank verse, rhymed couplets, haiku, ballad forms and the sonnet. It is at this point that the concept of writing stance is introduced, since the writer's purpose is embodied in the form he has chosen to use. (The student will be making these choices as well, when asked to write his own material.) The idea here is to advance from simpler forms to more controlled forms, following the analogy of the child moving through developmental stages. Again, modeling and practice exercises will reinforce the formal concepts. And finally, having collected the individual tools of verse, the students in the last instructional weeks are helped to discriminate between what they feel and what they think. These lessons are focused on the emotional content or the tone of poems. And here is where consideration is given to the writer's purpose—both in the models chosen for instruction, and for the student writer's sense of purpose when writing his own original poetry.

Finally, a couple of organizing features need explanation. In the early weeks of instruction, even though students have yet to learn the specific mechanical "tricks" of poets, the presentation of poems proceed in the same order as outlined in the description of analysis above. As the weeks advance, students increasingly own

what initially is the teacher's exclusive use of this protocol, since more is added to their knowledge base. So, what starts as teacher-centered activity in the actual lessons, becomes almost exclusively student-centered by the end of the unit. Classroom activities reflect this shift.

A prototype for the analytic part of lessons occurring in the beginning of a week involves what is called an *anticipatory set*, or an activity designed to set the stage or to provoke a mindset for the content of the lesson. Every lesson features a professional model, which contains strong examples of the particular poetic feature to be studied. The teacher reads the poem. Students are then asked to read it silently. The teacher asks students to identify and discuss words that seem to stand out as particularly important or unusually striking in that particular poem. Next, sounds that seem dominant are identified. Figures of language are the next focus of analysis. Individual images, or sustained imagery is inspected, after which attention shifts to that of form. Finally, after discussion of these features, students and teacher identify the tone (feelings) expressed in the poem. The last item of analysis has to do with discernment of the meaning of the poem in the context of what is revealed in all of the preceding considerations. The teacher then highlights the specific feature for that week and offers explanations. As a follow-up to the lesson, an activity designed to practice that feature is assigned for homework. This material is used in the workshop lesson at the end of the week.

As for the lessons occurring in the latter part of the week, there is no particular prototype, but activities always center on the arrangement of students into groups that involve their own career clusters. For example, students in the trades form groups with each other; likewise for students in the service career and the technical areas. This allows for conversation to take place among students of similar interests. These class sessions are far less formal than those early in the week. They follow a workshop model, in which students practice the poetic feature that was taught and modeled early in the week, and students are free to conference with each other or with the teacher. In this setting, students are provided with model poems whose topics relate to their specific careers when possible, and always relate to the themes of labor, the workforce, productivity, or some closely related theme. (There is a good deal of material available, both from the canon and in the contemporary scene—much of the latter available on the Internet, and identified in the student bibliography below.)

The week-by-week instruction in discrete features of poetry yields a quantity of material related to each feature—lists of words and phrases chosen for emotional content and imagistic power, charts detailing scansion and rhythm schemes, the professional models, homework exercises, and most importantly snippets of each of these that have been individually generated by students with their careers in mind. Students keep a cumulative journal in which they collect this work, and which ultimately serves as a checklist and resource for them when they are ready to write their original poems—the culminating activity of the unit. This work serves as the evaluated product. The rubric for this final poem includes scales for each of the traits that have been taught throughout the unit. This evaluative rubric appears in Appendix B.

The last weeks of the term are reserved for focused writing and conferencing with the teacher. Students word process their final products and save them for collection and publication by the teacher. Included also at the end of the unit is an opportunity for students who wish to read their work to the class. The very last period is reserved as a publication celebration.

Sound

The first thing considered in the first two weeks' lessons are sound devices. I have always believed that the special sounds associated with poetry are the *shiny* parts that attract us to it in the first place. Specific attention goes to sensitizing students to the sounds and rhythms of language in general, and then to the

sounds and rhythms created by poets for specific effects and purposes.

Alliteration and Onomatopoeia

The phenomenon of closely-repeated sounds in stressed syllables in a line of poetry constitutes alliteration—"Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers," for example. In my experience, most senior high students have had formal exposure to this term and how the device is used. Nevertheless, a re-focusing on this phenomenon is a good start to a study of sound in poetry.

In the first class of this week, using Richard Wilbur's poem, "Junk", selected lines from "Beowulf", and lines from Lady Macbeth's reaction to Macbeth's indecision in Act I of the play, students read aloud and hunt for the repetition of consonant sounds. Even if they don't know the contexts of these pieces, they can make observations about the effect of the sounds. What conclusion can they come to about the relationships between the sounds words make and what the words mean? The students' responses to this question become the first entries in their journals.

Onomatopoeia refers to words that, when uttered, make the sound of that which they name—the word "chug" for example. Even though the use of onomatopoeia can sound forced in a poem, the act of scanning words for this quality is worthwhile as part of a routine of composition. Vocational students can locate a variety of words (and will also invent words) that mimic the sounds inherent in their work. Class exercises to facilitate this include scanning lists of onomatopoeic words such as those in Fry & Kress's *The Reading Teacher's Book of Lists* (3rd ed.) (1993). I have found that providing something tangible like a list or catalog when introducing an idea like this keeps students at ease. There is also abundant research supporting this notion (Graham & Harris, 2000). Further, with the ubiquity of word processing and its dictionary and thesaurus capabilities, lists like this provided electronically can help students find the words they are looking for. I provide them this capability from my website. A teacher working in a networked environment can do the same in a shared folder, but a thesaurus and dictionary will suffice.

In the latter classes of these two weeks (writing workshops), grouped with their classmates in similar career areas, students generate two lists—one a list of alliterative phrases that capture the sounds that occur in their workplaces; the other, a list that contains words—real or invented—that themselves sound like the job tools or environment. They share them with each other in groups, and then with the whole class, explaining the machinery, the people, the tools, etc. that make these sounds. For example, a culinary arts student may attempt to reproduce the sounds of knives being sharpened or the process of julienne on a cutting board. These lists, along with a sheaf of poetry specific to the students' career areas, and their notes on alliteration and onomatopoeia, constitute the beginning of the writing journal that builds as the unit develops.

Assonance, Consonance and Rhyme(?)

I am not a big proponent of encouraging rhyme in student poetry. Many students believe that if it doesn't rhyme, it is not poetry. When they are fixed in this notion, it inhibits the flow of language at the expense of creating what often becomes singsong and trite verse. I try to help students distinguish between verse and poetry. Besides, it is very tough to use rhyme effectively, and it takes too much energy away from other tasks in the poetry writing process. That does not mean that rhyme is not useful sometimes, especially to punctuate, emphasize or to end a thought. Still, I tend to discourage it. The only time it is expected in this unit is when students try their hands at the sonnet, rhyming couplets and ballads, later in the unit.

An awareness of the phenomena of assonance—the repetition of vowel (soft) sounds in the stressed syllables

of a line of poetry, or consonance—the repetition of consonant (hard) sounds at the end of an accented syllable, are critical for students when they write poems, so that they can control the smoothness or flow, or lack thereof, in their work. Familiar to most students is alliteration, the repetition of an initial consonant or vowel sound in stressed syllables (Perrine, pp.320-321). A good exercise I have adapted from Wormser & Cappella (2000) is to use the Wilbur poem again, or any passage from "Beowulf". I assign students a vowel and ask them to identify the number of times it appears in the poem or selection—whether identified aurally or visually. Students then do the same with consonant sounds. Students discuss briefly the effect any sound repetition has on the hardness or softness in the passage, and what meaning those sounds suggest.

Next, both published and apprentice poems on the subjects of general labor and specific occupations are presented as models subject to scrutiny for onomatopoeia, assonance, consonance, and rhyme. Robert Frost's poem, *Psalm of Those Who Go Forth Before Daylight*, provides a good professional model. Students are given a copy and asked to identify each sound phenomenon. The alliteration in a line like, "The rolling-mill men and the sheet steel men are brothers of cinders ..." is not likely to escape a student's identification of the consonant *m* and *s* sounds, nor the assonance in the repetition of the *ee* sound. In the same poem, a line reads: "...their necks and ears are covered with a smut..." The word *smut* may well be tagged as an onomatopoeic word—it sounds like what it is! In exercises like this, the important idea is that students hear the sounds and make some reasonable inferences about the effect of hearing them. And that's all! I avoid any extensive interpretation or analysis at this point. Students need to perform these tasks with as much ease as possible, so that by the end of the unit there is comfort and familiarity with the tools they have learned to handle.

Rhythm

When rhythm is not carefully considered in the generation of poetry, the poet risks missing the opportunity to exploit one of the most basic of human traits. In the second and third weeks of instruction, the emphasis is on the rhythmic features of poetic diction. Rhythms of breath and heartbeat are mirrored in the man-made and in the natural worlds as felt in the regularity of operating machinery, and in the evening repertoire of the mockingbird. The first major instructional challenge is to help students to draw parallels between rhythmic conventions and the choices they make to enhance the purposes of their poems. To do these things, the general strategy is to use music, talking blues, rap, and common language to emphasize how rhythm combines with sounds to suggest meaning. To show students the ability of words to harness, mimic and manipulate these pulses, they will read and consider how poets have made use of verbal rhythms. This study will consider a range of conventions, from the stringent beats of iambic pentameter to the un-detained rhythms of free verse. Special study of four basic metric foot conventions will be included—iambic, dactylic, anapestic and trochaic—through scansion, and in practice.

Ba-boom, Iamb, Trochee, Dactyl and Anapest

I have used a technique I call "ba-boom" to entice students into the study of rhythm. The *ba* represents an unaccented or unstressed sound in a word; the *boom*, of course, is a stressed or emphasized syllable. "Four score and seven years ago" becomes *Ba-boom ba ba-ba-boom ba-ba!* Once students play this game a few times, I have found that they gain a new feel for syllabication. When they are comfortable enough with this routine, I have them apply it to a poem. For example, Shakespeare's line, "That time of year thou may'st in me behold," becomes *ba-boom ba-boom ba-boom ba-boom ba-boom*. It's easy for students to hear the repetition of the *ba boom* unit in this and almost every other line of this poem. Once that is clear, it is easier to explain that five *ba-boom*'s in a line is called *iambic pentameter*. Iambic because one *ba-boom* is called an *iamb*, and

five of them in a line translate to *penta* (five), and *meter* (measurement). To allay the misperception that a metrical foot is always two beats or syllables, I will scan several lines of anapestic and dactylic poetry to illustrate how one determines the predominant foot, and how the labels are determined. Students practice trochees (*boom-ba's*), dactyls (*boom-ba-ba's*), and anapests (*ba- ba-boom's*)! A chart showing when they are called dimeter, trimeter, tetrameter, pentameter, and hexameter is provided, but no evaluative tool is used to test memory or mastery of these tags, save one—iambic pentameter.

This is the most technical part of this unit. Admittedly, this is not fun or intuitive for everyone; but it accomplishes the goal of drawing attention to the fact that poets work hard at this aspect in composing—and that's the important thing. Students will frequently *ba-boom* their way through a favorite rap or song—evidence that the awareness of syllabication has developed.

Iambic Pentameter and Free Verse

Some researcher has surely looked at samples of poetry in English to see what the dominant foot is. My guess is that the iambic foot wins. Why? Perhaps because this rhythm (*ba- boom*) is the rhythm of the heart, the breath and the pulse. An interesting discussion can take place at this point about the appeal of iambic pentameter. Students may infer that it is conversational, or that a single exhalation of the breath in speech sustains five iambs. Ideas that the pattern is appealing, or facile, or natural, or musical, all support the notion that somehow the rhythm is essential in forming poetic utterances. In any case, on account of its frequent appearance in English poetry, students should know this pattern well. Also, later in the unit students look specifically at the Shakespearean sonnet, which is a form written in iambic pentameter.

Free verse—what most people are writing and reading today—is unstructured rhythm. That does not mean there is no rhythm, only that it lacks severe organization. A consideration of this comes last because, after seeing the regularity of *iambic pentameter*, it is easier for students to understand that poets actually have to create rhythms suitable to their purposes without a template when they write in free verse. The other reason is that students can mistake free verse for prose if it is not explained in terms of the integrity of its lines.

An exercise to get students working with iambic pentameter is to ask them to pick a passage from any book or newspaper—the more dry the language the better. Ask students to pick a few sentences and translate the same idea into lines of iambic pentameter, using as much of the original vocabulary as possible, and not changing the sense of the prose piece. As a companion exercise, doing the reverse is effective in demonstrating what is lost in a prose translation of poetry. Any published poem will do, but Robert Frost's *The Road Not Taken* is especially effective, because any prosaic translation turns into an unmusical and uninteresting story. For example, "Two roads diverged in a yellow wood" has to become something like, *There were two roads in the woods*. Boring! The point is clear, though, that something happens as a result of rhythmic patterns in poems.

Figurative Language

An understanding of figures of language is necessary when reading and writing poetry. The fifth and sixth weeks of instruction consider some important figures. Metaphoric speech is the source of color and subtlety in poems. Students analyze a few poems which effectively employ: simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, apostrophe, and symbolism. They practice each figure as they construct poems related to the workforce in general, and to the field of employment for which they are preparing in particular. All the while, remember, they are recording their work in an accumulating journal. The target of the unit is to be able to write the poem that defines, captures and shares feelings students have about their impending foray into the workforce.

Metaphor, Simile and Personification

In this instruction, I present a model like Sharon Olds's poem, "Feared Drowned," in which the speaker suddenly fears her husband has drowned. Similes such as, "I walk down the/ edge of the water, clutching the towel/ like a widow's shawl around me," provide students with a model for how the use of a *like* or *as* comparison can suggest meaning that relates to the whole poem.

An exercise for students to complete before the writing class at the end of this week asks them to generate a list of terms—especially trade jargon—and to complete similes by saying a two-cycle engine is like _____, or a curling iron is as _____ as a _____. In other words, students generate some simple comparisons for the tools and activities of their trades.

In their book on teaching poetry, Wormser and Cappella (2000) discuss Aristotle's notion that there is no accounting for having the "gift of metaphor," and they add that it just seems to come from a close acquaintance with a thing, a place, or a process (p. 138). Vocational students know their career areas, so it's fairly safe to assume that they experience that kind of intimacy with their work. Using Sylvia Plath's poem, "Metaphors," students readily see how the poet develops the idea of pregnancy in such lines as, "I'm a means, a stage, a cow in calf," or "This loaf's big with yeasty rising." After this published model is presented and put to some simple analysis for the comparisons, as an exercise in anticipation of the writing class, students will expand this poem by creating additional lines that extend the comparisons. Germane to this unit are the reflections of editors Oresick & Coles (1990) in their prefatory remarks to a collection of poems about blue-collar work:

Sometimes ...working, like writing, can mean producing something useful and beautiful...Working, at its best, and writing, also at its best, are acts of creative transformation: earth becomes glass, steel becomes truck cabs, hours become wages, the line becomes music, the factory becomes a jungle, miracles become commodities... (p. xxvii)

Indeed, the ultimate affective goal in helping students to make a metaphor is to enable them to see metaphors in their own lives, and in the lives of others in the execution of their labor.

To create for students material that shows how personification works, the Archibald Macleish poem, *Dr. Sigmund Freud Discovers the Seashell* (Perrine, p. 61), is presented in class. In this poem, science is given human characteristics. For example, "She knows how every living thing was fathered,/ She counts the fish at sea, but cannot care/ Why any one of them exists..." shows students how a poet can make statements about big ideas, in this case the cold, impersonal side of scientific study, by personifying it.

Symbolism, Hyperbole and Apostrophe

Tapping into the culinary arts, Joy Harjo's (1994) poem, *Perhaps the World Eats Here*, is the model for teaching symbolism. In this poem, the kitchen table takes on symbolic meaning as the poet catalogues the events in life that occur around that piece of furniture. "It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be/ human. We make men at it, we make women," says the poet. As an exercise, students are asked to identify a workplace, a uniform, or an implement used in the workplace and to describe what it represents to them, not only as workers, but also as human beings.

As Perrine says in his book, hyperbole is exaggeration, but "exaggeration in the service of truth" (p.96). The

reason I have chosen this convention for teaching is that student workers find it easy to identify in their work experience tasks or processes that beg for exaggeration. For example, "my shift went on for days," or "the chef handed me a mountain of potatoes to peel," or "he's working me to death." Expressions like these contain truths about the work experience.

And for apostrophe, or addressing the inanimate or abstract, a difficult but interesting poem for illustrating the figure is Keats's *To Autumn*, in which the season is addressed in these lines:

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store? Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing
wind...

This is a particularly good choice as a model for illustrating apostrophe, but at this point in the unit, it is a good choice on other grounds. Each model is dealt with in a protocol, and by this point students can profitably discuss the sound devices and rhythms, the metrics, and can probably see the personification. This is critical, since as each new week begins, the cumulative body of understanding developing is reviewed with each model. For this reason, lessons early in the week will probably run a full forty-five minutes, whereas in the start of the unit, this lesson may only have occupied fifteen minutes.

As an assignment for the workshop at the end of this week, students pick an inanimate object associated with their career areas, or the career area itself, and write lines that speak directly to them. For example, a student in nurse technology might direct lines to a syringe or a bedpan. Or he might speak to "Medical Care." The exercise requires the student to think concretely about the physical characteristics and then to abstract those features in an apostrophe.

Image

The creation of compelling imagery is especially central to every lesson in the seventh and eighth weeks. Students are exposed to imagery that involves any and all of the five senses. Using lists of words appropriate to each sense, students will make choices and create phrasing designed to stimulate senses consistent with conceptual, auditory and tonal intentions in original composition. Plus, the imagery comes from a landscape they know—their jobs in the workplace.

Sight, Sound, Smell, Taste, and Touch

Instruction in this part of the unit relies more heavily on the students' experience than it has so far. The occupations of vocational students are rich with sensory imagery. The tradesmen and women hear some very interesting sounds in their drills, saws, engines, keyboards and splicers. The cosmetology and culinary students are surrounded by scents and tastes. The technology students view the entire landscape of the Internet through a rectangular lens. And so forth.

Using Whitman's poem, *A Song for Occupations*, as a model, students stay alert to the images that suggest a picture, a sound, a scent, a taste, or a physical sensation. For example, after reading this excerpt,

House-building, measuring, sawing the boards, Blacksmithing, glass-blowing, nail-making, coopering, tin-roofing, shingle-dressing, Ship-joining, dock-building, fish-curing, flagging of sidewalks by flaggers, The pump, the pile-driver, the great derrick, the coal-kiln and brickkiln...

students catalogue the sensory words and keep them in their writer's journals. Additionally, lists of words chosen for each of the five senses are provided to them for the writing workshop later in the week.

Form

Inasmuch as the bulk of contemporary poetry is written in free verse, students will likely devote much of their effort to writing in this form. Nevertheless, in the ninth and tenth weeks of this unit, students examine the tightly controlled Shakespearean sonnet for its concision and usefulness in presenting an idea persuasively. Similarly, the deceptive haiku form will be read and practiced for its ability to distill imagery. The rhymed couplet, blank verse, and the narrative capacities of the ballad are modeled and practiced.

Blank Verse, Free Verse, Couplets, Haiku, and Narrative (Ballad)

Students are ready to mimic whole forms. I like to choose simple models of poems written in blank verse and ask students to change words in the lines, but to keep the iambic pentameter form. Additionally, they have at their disposal individual components that relate to the technical or career areas with which to work. They draw on the words and phrases they have collected so far in the previous classes to help them construct whole lines that conform to the formal structures. Models of each poem are read in this lesson, following the analytic protocol already described. For example, a handout with lines from poems illustrating the different forms is sufficient for this exercise.

For the blank verse exercise, students are handed a copy of Robert Frost's "Mending Wall." After rendering a class reading and conducting an analysis using the regular protocol for presenting a new poem, students are asked to use the first four lines to substitute words, phrases, or, for that matter, a whole idea from their workplace, and fit that phrasing and/or concept into a four-line form that is iambic in meter.

The same routine is followed for free verse, several lines of rhymed couplets, a haiku, and the beginning of a story in verse, as in a ballad. Models for these forms that have potential are many, but here are some examples of choices and how they might work. For free verse, e.e. cummings's poem, "In Just-," illustrates how the actual physical appearance of the words on the page takes on an additional importance, since regular rhythms, rhyme and form are absent from this convention. Vocational students could begin "In Just McDonald's..." for example, making it more concrete as a poem of place.

As for rhymed couplets, the description of the Pardoner from the *Prologue to The Canterbury Tales* provides a terrific model to copy, perhaps for a characterization of the student's supervisor, or shop teacher, or co-worker.

The haiku form is incredibly demanding for its economy of language and focus on image, but if the teacher keeps directions focused on producing the 5-7-5-syllable pattern, students can select a tool from work, or a job-related landscape or process, and work at re-producing the syllabic pattern. The website at: <http://www.tempslibres.org/tl/hku/open/work01.html> offers some clever haiku written by workers at their places of employment. Students (and teachers) may wish to visit this site for inspiration.

Finally, the ballad as a poetic device to tell a story (in this case about or related to the workplace) can be a longer assignment, if the student wishes to elaborate. In any case, a model that is good to use is the lyrics to Judy Collins's version of *Barbara Allen*, available online at <http://www.leoslyrics.com/listlyrics.php?jsessionid=44E9368B0D30C7138CC2D781EA2082C8?hid=ls%2F8WQYQ8hQ%3D>

—and on her album, entitled *Both Sides Now*. The purpose in this exercise on the ballad is to inspire students to add the skills they have practiced so far to a form that explicitly tells a story. Form is not as important in this exercise as is appropriating a storyteller's voice.

Shakespearean Sonnet

The sonnet is a very challenging form. Using Shakespeare's sonnet, *That time of year*, the form is explained for its meter, its rhyme scheme, (*abab, cdcd, efef, gg*), and its use of metaphor(s). Also, a good deal should be made about the development of the idea in this form, showing that it is logical, almost persuasive in its approach. Career students can be encouraged to use this form if they have opinions or strong feelings about the workplace or an employer, as a way of working out the rationale behind their belief or position. And the best thing about a sonnet is its ability to "bullet" or summarize the thought in the rhymed couplet at the end.

Tone and Emotion

A poet determines, by means of careful choices among words, phrases, images, and sounds, how to express a posture or attitude toward the subject of the poem. Among students whose writing emphasizes facts, figures, statistics, procedures and machine operations, it is a challenge for the teacher to shift the student's attention from this familiar external, mechanistic world to the inner realm of emotion. Lessons in weeks eleven and twelve of this unit, therefore, deal with the creation of tone as an expression of personal feelings.

Emotions versus Thoughts and Ideas (Denotation)

The heart of this lesson is the emphasis on how poets use words to identify and to create emotional content. The first lesson uses Robert Hayden's poem, *Those Winter Sundays*, whose persona recollects the work his father did unnoticed when he was a child. The poem uses many words that directly denote emotions. For example, *ached, anger, indifferently, love, and lonely*. By drawing attention to these words alone, it is possible to state accurately the tone or general feeling the writer has created.

Emotions Implied (Connotation)

The same model uses words and phrases that imply emotion, even though they are descriptive of objects or actions. For example, *blueblack cold, cracked hands, fires blazed, splintering, breaking, warm*, etc. By drawing students' attention to these descriptive words and asking them to infer emotions, they are made to consider the connotative meanings that also help to create the tone of the poem. As an exercise to prepare for the writing workshop later in these weeks, I provide kids again with a list of words organized according to the emotion they denote. This is again courtesy of Fry and Kress's *The Reading Teacher's Book of Lists*.

The Reading and Writing Protocols

The last two weeks of the unit are spent in practicing the analysis protocol learned in the preceding weeks. In these two days of lessons early in the week, poems are chosen that have more specific application to the students' careers. (A list of titles specific to the three vocational areas is included below.) These lessons are, by this point in the unit, a question of applying the knowledge of individual features to new poems, and following the procedure that has been used in every lesson from the beginning, and elaborated upon week by week as the semester has progressed. This repetition of the process is key in enabling students to feel comfort with analysis. As always, this analytic work is included in the writer's journal. Teachers can develop their own format for student recording and cataloguing this work.

Writing Conferences

In the writing conference, which occurs at the end of the week, students attend with the above outlined exercises completed. The focus of this workshop environment is on flexing the muscle defined by the focus of that particular week. Students are grouped with others who are studying trades or businesses in their cluster, i.e. service careers, trades, or technical areas. (If numbers are large enough in a particular area, that is, if there are five or six students in one shop, they can form their own group.) The teacher's role becomes that of coach, or consultant. He visits each group to offer assistance and feedback on what students have produced by way of homework exercises, and to ensure that for each piece of writing, students have taken a stance: lyric, narrative, or persuasive; that they have defined an audience: a boss, a coworker, a loved one, or a general audience; that there is a clear purpose in the writing: to entertain, to describe, to inform, to persuade, or to create/express some emotion. In this forum, students are provided with a large number of models (largely contemporary poetry, listed under materials for students) that directly relate to the student's career or to the workforce in general.

Further, the teacher reinforces the protocols used for reading, writing and analyzing poems by: attending to the sounds (onomatopoeia, assonance and consonance); identifying the rhythm (iambic, trochaic, etc.), even though being able to identify them by more than a *ba-boom* tag is unnecessary; identifying figures of language (metaphors, similes, personification, symbols, hyperbole, and apostrophe); scanning for and identifying imagery that provokes any and all of the senses; identifying form (blank verse, free verse, couplets, haiku, ballad, and the sonnet); and most importantly identifying and being able to explicate the emotion present in and driving the other features (choices, in the case of the student writer).

Performance and Publication Days

In the very last week, students share their work publicly to gain a sense of performance and audience, as in poetry readings in the outside world. This event is planned, is not optional (students must share their final work), and is celebratory in nature. Hard work should be rewarded!

Publication can take many forms. I have published booklets of student poetry before without much difficulty, and in the workshop setting, students are more than willing to assemble, collate and staple their own work. Exhibition is a necessary part of the writing process, for its salutary effect on the writer, for its motivational capacity, but also as a means of making a palpable connection to the real world, something vocational students routinely demand.

Finally, I asked myself what overarching result I might hope to see for students as a result of this experience, and for that matter, what threads might be created to join one lesson to another—especially as emergent themes? The answers I have for myself lie in imagining what effect a careful and systematic creation of a poem depicting my own job might have. I imagine that reflection on what a person does for a living will call into question what he likes about it, how he feels when he's doing it, what contribution it makes to progress, to his standard of living, and to his role in the community. Writing about the gainful activity that one performs in the world, but seeing connections to the larger world, may mean the difference, for students, between punching a clock to be able to eat, and hammering out a sense of meaning in the work they do.

Lesson Plans

Lesson 1. Rhythm

(This lesson illustrates the procedure early in the unit, in week 3, days 5 and 6.)

Objectives

The instructional objectives of this lesson are to familiarize students with four basic rhythmic patterns: iambic, trochaic, anapestic and dactylic feet; to use Shakespeare's Sonnet 73 as a model for illustrating iambic pentameter; and to model an analytic protocol which students will use with all poems studied.

Materials

The materials needed for this lesson include: a handout of Shakespeare's Sonnet 73 (iambic pentameter); the first 8 lines of Byron's *The Destruction of Sennacherib* (anapestic tetrameter); the first two stanzas of Shelley's *To a Skylark* (trochaic trimeter); and the first three stanzas of Thomas Hood's *The Bridge of Sighs* (dactylic dimeter). Also, students will need a handout of the *Metrics Matrix* (See Appendix A), and their student poetry-writing journals (3 ring binder for unit).

Procedure

The teacher reads Sonnet 73, and conducts a full protocol analysis. This routine first considers sound. The teacher asks students if they can find occurrences of alliteration, onomatopoeia, assonance or consonance. (This is asked because these features have already been taught in the first two weeks.) Next, the rhythm of the poem is considered. The teacher illustrates, by scanning lines, the occurrence of iambic pentameter in this poem. Remarks about the rhythm are limited to the fact that it is iambic—*ba-boom*—and that there are five such beats in every line. Also, this is the time to draw attention to the fact that this beat is the same beat as the heart, the pulse, breathing, etc. This point and all the others are instructive, because students have not yet dealt with these considerations in detail.

Next, figures of speech are discussed. Attention is drawn to the individual metaphors—the autumn tree, the end of the day, and the fire dying out—and the rhymed couplet at the end, which makes the poet's point. Other figures, like the simile in "That on the ashes of his youth doth lie/ As the deathbed whereon it must expire," can be explained as a comparison of the speaker's spent youth to a bed of ashes on which the time of his youth has passed away, but it is enough to point out one figure at this time.

The latter part of the analysis is cursory, since formal instruction in other traits has not taken place. However, the teacher must model the protocol, so imagery is considered by pointing out the colors, the times of day, the sensations of warmth in the fire image, the dark colors, perhaps the smell of a dying fire, to illustrate that a reader should look for things that stimulate the five senses. In a consideration of form, the teacher points out that there are 14 lines, that each line contains the rhythm mentioned above, and that the rhyme follows an *ababcdcdefefgg* pattern. In addressing tone, the teacher points to the feelings of the speaker in this poem as gratitude, perhaps resignation and reflection, and gives reasons for sensing this, especially as inspired by the sounds, rhythms and images.

Finally, in an open discussion, the teacher asks students what the poem might mean, in terms of who might

be saying it, to whom, for what purpose, and why in this particular form. Any reasonable answer is acceptable, because it is still early in the unit and students are still learning this protocol for analysis. The teacher explains how to use the *Metrics Matrix*, using *Sonnet 73*, and has students read the selections aloud, using the *ba-boom* activity. Rhythms are identified correctly for the students.

As an assignment, students use the *Metrics Matrix* to identify the names of the rhythms in the other poem fragments. The assessment of this learning will be based on completion of the exercise for the workshop.

Lesson 2. Sonnet

(This lesson illustrates the procedure for teaching the sonnet, near the end of the unit, in week 10, days 19 and 20.)

Objectives

The instructional objectives of this lesson are to illustrate the strict form, rhyme scheme and rhythm of the Shakespearean sonnet; to generate an original stanza and couplet which employs a metaphor from the student's career area; and to model an analytic protocol which students use to approach the poetry they read.

Materials

Students will need a copy of Shakespeare's *Sonnet 73*, a copy of Maggie Anderson's poem "Sonnet for Her Labor," and their poetry-writing journals.

Procedure

Since Shakespeare's sonnet has already been introduced, there is no need in the instructional class to undergo the protocol analysis. (The reintroduction of this poem, though, is a good opportunity to show students how their sensitivity to and understanding of poems can change over time.)

The poem, *Sonnet for Her Labor* (Coles & Oresick, 1995, p.9), by Maggie Anderson, is read, and undergoes the full protocol analysis. First, sound is considered. Students listen, as they have been shown, for alliteration, onomatopoeia, assonance and consonance. They briefly discuss and record their observations. The word "galluses" is defined as suspenders. Next in the procedure comes a consideration of rhythm. Students scan the poem as they have been shown. (It is iambic, but utilizes hexameter. It is a good time to demonstrate that poets can manipulate rhythms to suit their purposes.)

Students then identify symbols and the metaphors of the mountain, and food and cleanliness. They point to instances of imagery. Visual imagery, especially regarding food, water and cleanliness is emphasized.

In terms of form, like Shakespeare's sonnet, this poem develops ideas around the death of the speaker's Aunt Nita. Students look for three discrete ideas and the idea emphasized at the end of the poem in a rhymed couplet: "No one said a word to her. All that food/ and cleanliness. No one ever told her it was good." Students discuss the effect of the last lines on the development of the three ideas, namely how the revelation that this woman has devoted her life to the health and nourishment of the men in her life without recognition appears in a rhymed couplet at the end. Students are then asked to identify, using adjectives, the feeling or tone behind the speaker as she memorializes her aunt, and what words establish that tone.

Finally, the possible meaning of the poem is dealt with in an open discussion. Students are asked what the poem might mean, in terms of who is saying it, to whom, for what purpose, and why in this particular form. I accept any reasonable explanations which relate to the earlier considerations in the analysis.

An exercise in replication is assigned for the workshop session later in the

week (see Appendix C). Students are asked to invent one four-line stanza, which incorporates a person, object, process or idea from their shops. They are then asked to "punctuate" or summarize the developed thought in a rhymed couplet.

As an assignment, students complete the sonnet/quatrain/couplet exercise. Assessment is made based on the successful completion of the quatrain exercise.

Lesson 3. Sample Workshop Lesson

(A typical workshop day near the end of the unit. This lesson describes the operation of a workshop day on Friday, or the last day of the week.)

Objectives

The instructional objectives of the workshop lessons are to engage students with the reading and writing protocols they have been taught to use, and to provide peer and teacher feedback on their original written material.

Materials

Students will need to be equipped with their poetry journals, which now contain completed exercises, lists, models, and class notes from all the previous lessons. They will need a written version of the reading and writing protocol formats, a networked computer with word processing and web access, and a dictionary and a thesaurus.

Procedure

Students are seated in teams composed of classmates in the same career clusters, e.g., trade students include carpentry students, engine technology and electrical trades students. Each group member has a role in the team: discussion leader, recorder, reader, researcher and materials manager. These roles rotate from student-to-student through the course of the unit.

The first order of business is the review of the topic of the week's lesson by the teacher, and the sharing of the homework exercise within the groups. Next, students discuss with each other plans regarding their magnum opus—the culminating career poem. Third is the distribution of career-specific poetry from texts and from the Internet. (The researcher may be asked to find a poem or two in the provided books or from the web.) Students, in their assigned roles, conduct a discussion and analysis of a new poem. Finally, the reader performs the group's chosen poem and the discussion leader reports the highlights of the small group discussion to the whole class, with an emphasis on that particular week's poetic element. The teacher's role in these workshops is either to float from team to team as a monitor and resource person, or as a one-on-one consultant in writing conferences.

Assessment is accomplished in a formal report submitted to the teacher by the recorder. This report details

the high points of the discussion of individual students' planning, and a summary of the group's analysis of the new poem.

Teacher's Bibliography

Addonizio, K. & Laux, D. (1997). *The poet's companion: A guide to the pleasures of*

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on teaching poetry across the curriculum.

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Wormser, B. & Cappella, D. (2004). *A surge of language: Teaching poetry day by day*.

Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. A companion piece to earlier work that ambitiously declares that poetry teaching should be central in an English curriculum

Student's Bibliography

Coles, N. & Oresick, P., (Eds.) (1995). *For a living: The poetry of work*. Chicago:

University of Illinois Press. Follow-up companion to an earlier anthology, with poems by and about workers in many industries. Helpful index of occupations.

Daniels, J. (1990). *Punching out*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press. Down-to-earth, idiosyncratic poems written about plant work in Detroit.

Selected Poems on Service, Technical, and Trade Topics by Published Poets

Berryman, John. "Dream Song 54: 'NO VISITORS' I thumb the roller to"

Brooks, Gwendolyn. "To Those of My Sisters Who Kept Their Naturals"

Burns, Robert. "Some Hae Meat"

Chaucer, Geoffrey. "A Cook" (Prologue to "Canterbury Tales")

Dickinson, Emily. "Myself was formed—a carpenter"

Dunbar, Paul Laurence. "The Lawyers' Ways"

Fielding, Henry. "Roast Beef"

Frost, Robert. "'Out, out—'", "Mowing", "The Axe-Helve" and "Blueberries"

Guest, Edgar. "They Earned the Right"

Graves, Robert. "Careers"

Hayden, Robert, "Those Winter Sundays"

Housman, A.E. "The Carpenter's Son"

Kilmer, Joyce. "The House with Nobody in It"

Masters, Edgar Lee. "Griffy the Cooper", "Paul McNeely", "Sersmith the Dentist", "Mrs.

Merritt", "Judge Somers", "The Circuit Judge" and "Mrs. George Reece"

Milton, John. "Sonnet XIX: On His Blindness"

Neruda, Pablo. "Ode to An Onion"

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Piercy, Marge. "For the Young Who Want To"

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and "Lullaby"

Southey, Robert. "To A Goose"

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Note: For contemporary and classic poems in specific career areas on the Internet, use a search engine and type: poetry or poems about + [career (carpentry for example)].

Appendix A. Metrics Matrix

Students are given this blank matrix and the teacher presents a poem in a variety of metric forms. After the models are presented, the class can help the teacher scan lines. Once predominant feet are identified, students are directed to figure out how many of them there are in a line, read the chart from the top, i.e. the number of feet, and then at the left for the corresponding foot, and identify with a mark, or verbally, how the line scans, by reading the combined term. In the example, what has been read is dactylic trimeter.

(table 05.01.06.01 available in print form)

This could be made a game, and I would certainly keep it light. The point here is to acknowledge that poetry

professionals are acutely aware of these rhythms, and that they employ them to achieve rhythmic effects that suit the subjects of their poems.

Appendix B. Rubric for Vocational Poem and Analytic Scale

(table 05.01.06.02 available in print form)

Sound

1. The writer has made a very successful effort to use assonant and consonant sound, or onomatopoeia which supports the poem's topic
2. The writer has clearly made some effort to use assonant and consonant sound, or onomatopoeia appropriate to the poem's topic
3. The writer has made little effort to use assonant and consonant sound, or onomatopoeia
4. The writer has made no effort to use assonant and consonant sound, or onomatopoeia

Rhythm

- 4- The writer has effectively employed rhythms and meter appropriate to the poem's topic
- 3- The writer has mostly employed rhythms and meter appropriate to the poem's topic
- 2- The writer includes some identifiable rhythm or meter to the poem
- 1- The writer has employed no identifiable rhythm or meter appropriate to the poem

Figures

- 4- The writer has carefully chosen a few figures of language to engagingly support the poem's topic
- 3- The writer has carefully chosen at least one figure that mainly support the poem's topic
- 2- The writer has chosen at least one figure, but which has little or no effect on the poem
- 1- The writer has not employed any figures of language in the poem

Imagery

1. The writer employs sensory imagery to great effect
2. The writer employs sensory imagery to some effect
3. The writer employs sensory imagery to extraneous or to no effect
4. The writer does not employ words or phrasing to any imagistic effect

Form

- 4- The chosen form of the poem is important and meaningful to its topic development
- 3- The chosen form of the poem is appropriate to its topic development
- 2- The chosen form of the poem is inconsequential to its topic development
- 1- The chosen form of the poem is inappropriate or non-existent

Tone

- 4- The writer has created identifiable, predominant emotion(s) in the poem with great power

- 3- The writer has created identifiable, predominant emotion(s) in the poem to some effect
- 2- The writer has created identifiable emotion(s) in the poem, but to little or contradictory effect
- 1- The writer has created no sense of emotion in the poem

Appendix C. Sonnet Exercise.

This is the last quatrain and ending couplet of Maggie Anderson's poem "Sonnet for Her Labor"¹

One March evening, after cleaning, she lay down to rest and died. I can see Uncle Ed, his fingers twined at his plate for the blessing; my Uncle Craig leaning back, silent in red galluses. No one said a word to her. All that food and cleanliness. No one ever told her it was good.

And the same place in Shakespeare's Sonnet 73:

In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire, That on the ashes of his youth doth lie
As the deathbed whereon it must expire, Consumed with that which it was
nourished by. This thou perceivest, which makes thy love more strong, To love that
well which thou must leave ere long.

Now you try:

Remember to pick a subject, person, idea or process related to work.

Make the rhyming couplet at the end a final idea, a wrap-up, a summary, or a surprise.

Bring this exercise to the workshop.

1. ¹ Anderson, M. (2000). "Sonnet for Her Labor" in *Windfall: New and selected poems*.
2. University of Pittsburgh Press. Used by permission of the author.

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