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The Sound Within: An Exploration of Prosodic Elements in Poetry

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Overview

Imagine children on a playground. The rhythmic lapping of a jump rope marks a steady beat as the children giggle, swaying to and fro, each child anxiously awaiting her name to be called. All the while the chant rises, "Down in the valley where the green grass grows. There sat she sat as sweet as a rose."

Save for the sound of your voice if you read the passage aloud, sound does not physically exist in this memory, yet you can hear the lap, lap, lapping of the rope and the pattern created within the chant. The focus of this unit is the exploration of that phenomenon - *auditory imagery*. The unit was developed to help students make a connection between what words mean, how the words sound, and how the two support one another within poetry.

The poems referenced in this unit were chosen for the over-arching theme of perseverance that each supports - either because the poet has overcome adversity, the poem's content implies such, or because of the consistent pattern of sound that ripples through the poem. Students will explore the elements of sound in the three categories of poetry, *lyrical, narrative, and dramatic*, through reading, listening, analyzing, writing, and peer-response activities.

This stand-alone course was designed for seventh and eighth grade students in the Humanities Department of the Pittsburgh Public Schools gifted education program. These students have extremely high cognitive abilities and need strength-based enrichment activities in addition to what they receive in the mainstream curriculum. Each student attends the program one day per week. The students have the rare, college-like opportunity to choose the courses they will take each semester. Each course meets for 1.5 hours per week over a 16-week semester.

Rationale

I have been asked, "What value does the teaching of poetry hold in relation to the academic needs of our students?" The answers to this question are innumerable, but let me point to the most academically compelling. Foremost, other than within music, one will find limited literature that condenses the plethora of ideas and devices, that poetry does. Except for music, no other form of communication lends itself to the study of sound as does poetry. Studying the elements of sound in poetry can help students become more effective writers in all genres. In *Writer's Ask*, a periodical that publishes interviews of writers about writing, author Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni commented on the crossover from poetry to prose: "[P]oetry...makes me more sensitive to language, particularly to the sound of words. I'm very aware of the rhythm of prose - which is very different from poetry, but it is certainly there. If you're not used to writing poetry, you're not aware of it" (Divakaruni, 5). In addition, the characteristic briefness of poetry allows for a variety of ideas to be explored within a short timeframe. Most importantly, my large student base contains a constantly expanding spectrum of cultures and an even larger array of learning styles. A wide variety of poems written by poets from all walks of life can be explored to help reach these students, whereas other forms of literature pose significant time constraints and make it difficult to reach all ethnic and social groups.

Poetry is the thoughtful combination of words supported by structural components that enhance the overall effectiveness of the work. Poetry falls into three categories: lyrical, narrative, and dramatic. *Lyrical poetry* is the category in which most poetry falls. Such poems are generally short and structured, like tanka or haiku. *Narrative poetry* tells a story. Examples of poems in this category are epics and ballads. Epics are long poems that unveil heroic deeds. Ballads are much shorter than epics, and focus on one particular person. *Dramatic poetry* is the third category; however, it arguably differs little from narrative poetry. Dramatic poetry can often be in play or story form if either of those contains poetic elements, such as the use of rhyme or meter. Many of Shakespeare's plays could be categorized this way.

Poetry exists in many forms. For students, the word *form* conjures thoughts of tangible and visible things, such as a book, tree, or desk. Many forms do lend themselves to a visual acquisition of structure, such as a poem written in quatrains. Limericks and nursery rhymes, for example, allow you to easily *hear* their form.

Prosody is the study of versification - the **orally** delivered arrangement of acoustic patterns. Reading poetry aloud makes one consciously aware of sound. Robert Hass examined the interconnectivity between words and sound. If, as Hass states, "the material of poetry is language...", then the spirit of a piece of poetry must be sound (Hass, 119). Sound is the foreground for poetry. It has a direct relationship with meaning. One cannot exist without the other, yet the sound of words used within a work of poetry is often taken for granted. When poetry is read aloud, several devices are specific to the creation of sound, building an auditory imagery for the reader. A non-exhaustive list of elements that create auditory imagery includes accent, alliteration (assonance and consonance), dialect, line break (enjambment and end-stop), meter, onomatopoeia, pitch, punctuation, repetition, rhyme, rhythm, and word structure.

It is my intention to access the student's prior, and possibly untapped, knowledge by beginning with rhyme and meter - specifically nursery rhymes and Limericks - as these are commonly recited during early childhood. These forms of poetry have consistent rhyming and structures. Rhythm is the pattern of sound created by the alternating lengths and emphasis metrical given to different syllables. The rise and fall of spoken language is called cadence. Meter is the rhythmic pattern of syllables spoken with accent in a specific sequence. Accent refers to a stressed, *or orally punctuated*, syllable. A stressed syllable is also often referred to as *long*. Slack

refers to a syllable that is not stressed and is interchangeably referred to as *short*. A stress is usually noted with a strike mark **ˈ** and unstressed is noted as a smile-of-sorts, **˘**.

There are several types of meter used in the English language. The act of reading line-by-line and marking the stressed syllables is called scansion. An iamb is two syllables spoken as unstressed - stressed. This type of meter is medieval in origin. An example of a poem written in iambs is Paul Lawrence Dunbar's "We Wear the Mask." (see *Poem Selections and Background* section below) American Standard English is generally spoken in iambs. The word hello, for example, is marked as it is spoken:

˘ ˈ
/hɛl/lo/

A trochee is the opposite of an iamb. It also is two syllables, but is spoken as stressed-unstressed. An example of trochaic meter is seen in Eloise Greenfield's poem "Way Down in the Music" (see *Poem Selections and Background* section below). A spondee is two syllables spoken as stressed-stressed. Spondaic meter is rarely a dominant pattern, as there are few words in the English language that follow this meter. It is more commonly seen in Latin poetry. An anapest is three syllables spoken as unstressed-unstressed-stressed. Anapestic meter is commonly used in poetry written for children. An example is the poem "The Night Before Christmas." A dactyl is three syllables spoken as stressed-unstressed-unstressed. Dactylic meter is seen in ancient Greek and Roman poetry. An example is the epic by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow entitled "Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie."

The term *feet* refers to the units of measurement in any particular type of meter. If, for example, you have a line of poetry that has five feet in iambs, then it is said to be in iambic pentameter: monometer = one foot, dimeter =two feet, trimeter =three feet, tetrameter=four feet, pentameter=five feet, hexameter=six feet, heptameter =seven feet, octameter=eight feet. When any of these types of meter are used consistently throughout a piece of poetry, the poetry is considered to fall under the category of accentual-syllabic meter. This category counts both syllables and the accents, having a specific number of syllables that are broken into a specific pattern of accents. It is the metrical structure that creates the sounds that many English speakers think of as poetry.

In free verse poetry, the structure is often detected primarily through the ear. Sound is physical; thus it has form. We cannot see or touch it, but it is a moving, spirited entity, resounding around us. In order to read and understand a poem in the manner in which the poet had intended, this requires the student to be knowledgeable of the multitude of this possibility. They need to be cognizant that poets make choices about what form their poems will take and how the form will effect the poem's meaning, and this includes the *form* of the poem in the reader's ear.

Although poetic forms are not the focus of this unit, free verse poetry is most frequently used in this unit because I think this type of poetry requires a lot from both the reader and the writer. Uncovering the careful and responsible construction of such a poem will certainly be a challenge for the students. Free verse needs to be explained using the concept of meter. When interviewed about his writing, novelist Chang-rae Lee said, "There's nothing more beautiful to me than free verse. There's a rigor to it, but also possibilities within the meter and stresses that are amazingly wide and strangely beautiful" (Lee, 6). Free verse is not truly free. I think that it is safe to say that in a poet's attempt to write in free verse, they take on the responsibility of creating sound in the absence of a prescribed form. Free verse is often written in accentual meter, which can interchangeably be called strong-stress meter or alliterative-meter. Noting the strong accents -not syllables- in

a line of poetry reveals the sound structure within a piece of free verse poetry. Scansion is the act of reading poetry aloud to find the natural fall of accents. The number of syllables between the accents is not counted in free verse. Anglo-Saxon meter has a grouping of four accents per line of poetry, but contemporary accentual meter can vary. Richard Wilbur's "Junk" is an example of Anglo-Saxon accentual or alliterative meter. Several examples of free verse poems are referenced in this unit, including Jimmy Santiago Baca's "Set This Book On Fire," Eloise Greenfield's "Way Down in the Music," Langston Hughes "From Mother to Son," " Sylvia Plath's "Daddy."

Pitch is a concept that I would like to students to consider while reading and writing poetry. Pitch accounts for the difference between the emotions and facial expressions are conjured when the words like *terrible* and *gloom* are spoken.¹ It is not merely the definition of a word that gives it life. Inhalation, exhalation, vocal cord compression, and the muscles of the mouth create the sounds of different letters. An example of the use of pitch is seen in Jimmy Santiago Baca's "Set This Book on Fire!" (see *Poem Selections and Background* section below).

There are many other literary devices that are essential for students to learn so that the student can connect the figurative meaning of a poem to its structure. Many of these devices do also help to create a sound for the reader. Imagery is the most easily recognizable literary device. Imagery is not limited to words that help to create an image, but also encompasses all of our senses, including sound. These images are created through unique word choice and are often embedded within other devices. Devices that help to create an image in the readers mind also help to create meaning. This includes the sounds that are created by the words and structure of a poem.

Symbolism is the use of imagery that stands for something greater than itself. A rose, for example, can be a representation of the duality of love - painful when thorny or unrequited and beautiful or fragrant when requited. Comparative devices such as simile, metaphor, allegory, and allusion, help to create images, and with a careful selection of words, can also create sound.

Poem Selections and Background

The district in which I work is moving toward theme-based instruction. The premise for this is that when given an overarching theme to consider, students are not flying blindly into new material. Use of themes helps students to access prior knowledge, which helps students analyze new material more efficiently. For this reason, I have chosen the theme of perseverance. Either the poet selected had led a tumultuous life and persevered, like Jimmy Santiago Baca, for example, or the poem is reflective of personal or societal unrest and resolution. In most of the poem selections, the notion of auditory perseverance is also demonstrated through the consistent pattern of sounds that are created by the poet's careful selection of words and use of devices. The following section has been compiled in the order of which I feel it should be presented to the students.

Teacher-Written Selection

"Logical Limerick"

Study of Meter and Rhyme

Although the primary focus of this unit is on free verse poetry, it would be beneficial for students to compare the seemingly non-structured free verse poems with the visually structured, such as in a Limerick. Read the Limerick aloud:

Here's a riddle for you to ponder. It is on the board over yonder. It is really not hard. Just think like a bard Or time you will certainly squander! An entire class thought of the matter: *If you say my name I will shatter*. A battle broke out! What's this riddle about? You're doing it now as you chatter!!

A Limerick is in stark contrast to the other poems that are presented in this unit, yet all of the poems in this unit, including the Limerick, contain similar devices. Since many students first experience with poetry includes rhyme, limericks are a good place to begin our journey-the will be exposed to rhyme, rhythm, meter, and message. The students can explore these poems to learn how to note rhyme schemes and uncover and cite metrical structure.

Limericks are usually vulgar or absurd, as the poem form is thought to have originated in Ireland as drinking songs as created by soldiers. Regardless of content, the traditional poem has five lines in length, contains aabba rhyme scheme, and is to be written and spoken in anapestic meter, with lines 1, 2, and 5 using three feet and lines 3 and 4 using 2 feet. Each anapestic foot has three syllables. The first two syllables are unstressed and the third is stressed. A non-traditional Limerick follows all of the forms rules, except that it may contain multiple stanzas.

An important point of discussion involves the use of end-rhyme. When rhyme is used, expectancy is created within the reader. The aabba rhyme scheme encapsulates the poem, thus the reader senses the upcoming fulfillment of rhyme. When the final line comes, a sense of closure is granted.

Another important aspect is the lack of an actual syllable in the last foot of lines 3 and 4 of the second stanza. Since this poem form requires 2 feet in each of these lines, why does this poem not contain the completing syllables? In order to complete the requirements for this line, the reader must utilize their knowledge of anapestic meter and add a pause in place of the absent syllable - this pause is called caesura. Not only does this create the missing syllable, but it also adds a dramatic moment of silence, or rest, just a composer would use to fulfill the requirements for a measure of music.

Jimmy Santiago Baca

"Set This Book On Fire"

Study of Enjambment, Alliteration (Consonance), and Auditory Imagery

A contemporary poet from New Mexico, Jimmy Santiago Baca was orphaned and, for a period, lived on the streets. He battled with drug addiction and was illiterate until he taught himself to read while in jail. He often chooses to write about the struggles of others, especially those of his ancestors, the Mayan and Navajo. In his book, *Working in the Dark: Reflections of a Poet of the Barrio*, he discusses the burden of carrying "la marca," or the mark, which is his reason for writing of perseverance (Baca, 157).

In discussing the power of language Baca has stated, "I thoroughly believe that metaphor and simile can pierce steel" (Copeland, 44). He has described his reason for writing poetry with a metaphor: "If an infant cries in the dark, you pick it up" (Baca, 148). Even when writing prose, Baca manages to create sound, as with his

use of the auditory image of an infant's cries penetrating silence. His ability to render seemingly tangible auditory metaphors is astounding. Students need to be able to identify as well as learn how to construct metaphors.

This poem will be used to expose students to idea of carefully choosing words that fit and sustain mood or attitude in a piece of writing. His free verse poem "Set this Book on Fire" is aimed at those who are creating poetry. It is a call to let writing be true for truth's sake - not to earn accolades. The poem, which is also the title of the book in which it was published, begins with an enjambed line in a singular trochee: "Rising," which immediately slows the momentum of the poem and holds the reader temporarily captive. The sound perseveres, lingering and lifting slowly. The second line, "in the glow of the embers," is end-stopped by the comma and is used to give rise to the smoldering metaphor for superficiality. His words create images and his images support his message.

Throughout the poem, he often smacks the reader with alliteration. He writes, "The last thing we need is more toothless-tigers". It is not merely the reference to those who are untrue to them selves that is alluring, but rather the choice of double stops. A *stop* is a speech pathology term defining consonants that are formed by completely stopping the flow of air. The stop made by the letter *T* is a voiceless alveolar stop, which means that the vocal cords are restricted. These stops cause the reader to spit at the end of each word in "toothless tigers." The consonant *T* is used intentionally throughout the poem, creating a feeling -and a *sound* - of disgust. It is the poet's polite way of saying be real, or shut up.

Paul Lawrence Dunbar

"We Wear the Mask"

Cadence, Rhythm, Iambic Tetrameter, Alliteration (Assonance)

Born in Dayton, Ohio to freed Kentucky slaves, Dunbar had a natural talent for interpreting the world around him and capturing it in literary form. He was the editor of his high school newspaper, which was published by Orville Wright. Despite being academically inclined, he was too poor to attend college. He self-published and sold his first book of poems to the people who rode the elevator that he was employed to operate.

The historical context of Dunbar's poem "We Wear the Mask" is profoundly reflected with in it. It is an excellent example of how condition often guided the poet. Students will be able to research Hughes history to see how the oppression and perseverance of African-Americans is catalogued within the poem.

The mask image within this poem may very well have been a subtle reminder to the African-Americans of the time period that pride stands away from complaint, but the mask also conjures images of the African continent where wearing a mask -which is a full-body suit in the culture- is a symbol of pride and tradition. The man and the mask are inexplicably and inseparably united. Written in iambic tetrameter, one cannot miss the cadence that is created:

U / U / U / U /
"We wear | the mask | that grins| and lies,"

It is reminiscent of a heartbeat, a persevering sound often played on a Djembe drum, which is used to call people to gather.

Strong emphasis is also created by the use of rhyme and alliteration. The poem is written in rhyming couplets that create anticipation and expectation. I surmise that the use of assonance at the end of all of the lines (*except the refrain*), which repeats the long / sound, is intentional - perhaps making the reader point to his or herself as if it were a possessive pronoun. The refrain "We wear the mask" is found three times - once in each stanza. Dunbar uses repetition as a way to punctuate his point - past, present, and future all connected, persevering.

Eloise Greenfield

"Way Down in the Music"

Study of Free Verse, Rhythm, Trochaic Tetrameter, Alliteration (Consonance)

A contemporary African American author of several books, including a "rap" infused novel entitled *Nathaniel Talking*, Eloise Greenfield cites "I create from real-life composites of real people." She says that adults do not people-watch as much as children tend to do, but as a writer, it is absolutely necessary to continue the habit. She prefers to write from the point-of-view of African American children, depicting perseverance.

Greenfield's poem, "Way Down in the Music," is in free verse, but it certainly is not free - it is responsible, yet spirited. In the first line of Greenfield's poem the stresses create a line of trochaic tetrameter:

/ U / U / U / U
"I get way down in the music"

This simple reversal of iamb to trochee stands in contrast to Dunbar's poem, which will be discussed with the students. Unlike Dunbar's iambs, the trochaic meter creates an upbeat, soulful swing. Ironically, the accent on "way" drops the voice, conjuring an image and feeling of dancing to the floor, or simply really enjoying the sound. You hear your voice lowering and emphasizing the deepness of the word. Like Dunbar, Greenfield uses alliteration to draw auditory attention to a particular letter. The consonant *D* is repeated in nearly every line, also creating a drum-like beat. A peaceful, rhythmic perseverance is created, one in which the speaker of the poem demonstrates by dancing straight through to the end.

Langston Hughes

"From Mother to Son"

Study of The Creation of Sound through Dialect

Langston Hughes was born in Missouri and lived most of his childhood with his grandmother. From early childhood, Hughes felt the strain of stereotyping. He graduated from Lincoln University. He wrote in many genres, but is best known for how he cataloged the African-American condition within his poetry. He was considered to be an integral part of the Harlem Renaissance.

When Hughes' poem, "From Mother to Son," is discussed with students, they will be asked to find the connection to perseverance, which is three-fold. First, Hughes is a poet who faced many challenges. Second, the message of the speaker is encouraging the 'son' to persevere. Third, the sounds created through the use of dialect stand as a lasting tribute to the lessons taught to him by the 'mother.'

In "From Mother to Son," Hughes creates a voice for the speaker by using dialect -particularly by using slang

and by dropping letters from the ends of words. Hughes is a well-known poet, and I expect that most students will be validated knowing that such a poet would choose to 'speak' as the students' so often do. The first example of slang, "Life for me ain't been no crystal stair." uses 'ain't' and a lack of the plural form of 'stair', but it serves to immediately create a voice. It is important for students to think about the purpose of dialect. Dialect creates a familiarity between the speaker and the reader as if the speaker is real and is trusting of the reader. In this poem, a unique juxtaposition is established by the use of dialect. The mother speaks in an uneducated tone, yet she delivers an undeniably wise life message that guides the 'son'.

Sylvia Plath

"Daddy"

Study of Dramatic Monologue, Repetition, Allusion through Word and Sound

Born and raised in Massachusetts, Sylvia Plath did not lead a privileged life, yet her open-book approach to writing earned her a free ride to Smith College. Her father, Otto, a teacher, died when she was merely 8. Their relationship, as would her relationship with other men, became the driving force behind much of her writing. Although her father wished for her to learn to speak German, Plath never did. Sylvia suffered a mental breakdown during college and was admitted into an asylum. She attempted to committed suicide several times, unfortunately being successful.

Plath renders painfully powerful auditory imagery within her poetry. In *The Poetry Life: Ten Stories*, past Maine Poet Laureate Baron Wormser wrote of this quality: "Saying it broke a silence inside me. Her poetry was a sort of wheedling hurt..." (Wormser, 146). The author's choice to use the word "saying" rather than reading is indicative of the quality of Plath's work. It speaks to you. Her voice is clearly heard.

"Daddy," will be used to compare the difference between using dialect to create familiarity, as Hughes did in "Mother to Son," to the distance that the careful use of foreign words can create, as Plath often did. "Daddy" is a poem in which knowing the poet's background sheds light on the poem's meaning. Plath creates auditory imagery by using subtle German sounds and words to allow the reader to hear her suffering. For example:

I never could talk to you.

The tongue stuck in my jaw.

It stuck in a barb wire snare,

Ich, ich, ich, ich,

Plath's use of *ich* conjures the image of a struggling German speaker. It is a fitting auditory image, as it emphasizes Plath's desperation and limitations.

Richard Wilbur

"Junk"

Study of Sound Structure as Created by Anglo-Saxon Alliterative Verse

Richard Wilbur was a gifted student who published his first poem at the age of eight. He served in the army

during WWII and had attended and taught at many prestigious colleges. He has won two Pulitzer prizes and has also served as a Poet Laureate Consultant.

"Junk" is written in Anglo-Saxon alliterative meter. This type of meter is defined by four stresses within each line, created by the use of alliteration. The poem is structured in two, message-supporting wobbly columns, which seems to be best read from left to right, rather than read in one column and then the other. When read from left to right, an attentive ear will detect the four stresses created in nearly every line, for example:

/ / / /
"An **axe** **angles** from my **neighbor's ashcan**,"

This poem ties into the concept of perseverance in numerous ways. I expect that students will ascertain the message of the poem -one man's junk is another man's treasure- but what I really would like them to discover is how the use of this type of meter reflects the poem's message. Anglo-Saxon meter is often considered old hat, yet in "Junk" the use of old hat demonstrates a sort of recycling - which is another way of creating a treasure out of something discarded by others.

William Carlos Williams

"To a Poor Old Woman"

Study of Enjambment

Williams was born and educated in the public school system in New Jersey. Both of Williams's parents were immigrants. His father was from England and his mother from Porto Rico. He is credited with a writing style that is "strategically plain" (Longenbach, 16). He became a physician, but claimed to have worked harder while trying to improve his writing abilities.

In *The Poetry Life: Ten Stories*, Baron Wormser writes of his first experience with Williams's poetry: "The lines didn't go all the way to the right-hand side of the page the way they do in prose...And the lines ended in funny places, like with the word 'the.' He goes on to say that they idea of focusing on the word "the" made him feel awkward, but appreciative. Williams carefully selected his words - and the structure they took on the page. As Wormser points out, there were never "...words that didn't matter" (Wormser, 34). Williams's effectiveness is due, in part, to his mastery of enjambment.

Line break techniques connect the visual to the auditory. In Williams's poem, "To a Poor Old Woman," the act of breaking the lines creates emphasis or accent on certain words - it works to slow or accelerate momentum. In *The Resistance to Poetry*, Longenbach says that the enjambment choices are "isolating particular words and forcing us to create a different pattern of emphasis with each repetition" (Longenbach, 18).

The title "To a Poor Old Woman" is a very good place to start. The word "To" serves not as a dedication to the woman, but as a statement of situation. The second stanza readily demonstrates the effectiveness of this notion, using enjambment:

They taste good to her

They taste good

to her. They taste

good to her

The first line reads with a normal speaking rhythm, with the accented falling on "good." The momentum slows as the second line shortens - the accent falling on "taste." The third line's accent falls on "her." It is the only line with punctuation, which halts the progression of the poem. The preceding lines force the reader to emphasize the last, causing the reader to focus on it's meaning - the sustenance is *needed*.

Objectives

This unit has a simple, three part, interrelated objective: The students will be able to define, find text-based examples of, as well as create examples of elements of auditory imagery through a study of the poems referenced within the unit.

Strategies

An educated relationship must exist between the reader and writer of poetry. The relationship lends itself to a need for an intense, analytical study of reading and writing. Studying in such a fashion will undoubtedly help to produce more capable readers and writers. So, how do we help students *learn* to read and write poetry? In order to construct meaning, students must not merely absorb the teacher's statements, but must be given the opportunity to churn and produce. To churn and produce requires analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. They need experiences in all levels of communications, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

In a lecture at Yale, Langdon Hammer raised the point, "Sound cannot be stopped. It is physical. It is both material and immaterial." Sound is not merely a vibration. Students need to be aware that sound exists when words create patterns. These patterns help to slow or move the reader along when he or she is reading a poem. Poets intentionally create these patterns to enhance the effectiveness of the poem. A guiding question will be continually posed to the students throughout the unit so that they will focus on this notion: *How does the poet create sound? Why do the patterns support the meaning of the poem?*

Each of the poems chosen for this unit will be used in a routine. Every two weeks, the students will be given two similar poems, one the first week and one the second. A quadruple-entry journal method will be used so that the students can first explore the poem independently, reading and reflecting first without background so that the students have no preconceived notions regarding the historical context of the poem. In the second entry, the students will have the opportunity to look-up new vocabulary and information about the author and add to the reflection. As prosody implies, poetry should enter the ear. It is important for students to *hear* poetry. The group will do a third reading orally, with a note to pay attention to a particular prosodic element.

The fourth part of the quadruple-entry will be the reflection of what the students have learned about the poem as a result of creating a write-like, which is an original poem based on the author's techniques. This is often called a *Read-to-Write Approach* or *Author Interactive*.

When students are beginning to write a poem, they will be guided through the Creative Thinking Model, which is a procedure for 'brainstorming.' The first step is to have the student list as many ideas as he or she can think of about a particular subject. The second step is to have the student group similar ideas from step one. Step three requires the student to choose the most appropriate idea and write a statement as to why it is the best choice. The final step is to have the student elaborate upon the idea.

Who has the greater responsibility, the writer or the reader? Once a piece of writing has left the final-edit of the poet's pen, it is only in the educated mind of the reader that the poet's true intent can be uncovered. For this reason, students will use a guided response evaluative method to edit each other's work. This method uses constructive criticism in a set pattern. First, the students simply edit for misspellings and grammatical errors. Next, the students write reflections by answering: "What is good about this writing? Here is the textual evidence that supports my statement..." and "What may improve the writing? Here is textual evidence and/or an example of my idea..."

The long-term project is based on a district-wide initiative in which the students read several selections from the same author, as well as the gifted model for education that requires that the students learn to independently develop and compete projects. I am offering two possible long-term projects. The first uses the guiding question: *How does popular music reflect the genius of poetry?* The second is slightly more structured and will require the students to select a favorite poet of whom to thoroughly explore.

Classroom Activities

The following activities are enumerated in the order of which I think they should be presented to the students. The lessons are in scaffold from the familiar and quickly accessible, to the unfamiliar and challenging. With the exception of the first three, the activities will take roughly three sessions each, as session one will be the introduction to a new poem and concept, session two will be a check for analytical understanding with a similar poem, and week three will be a write-like workshop to allow the students to synthesize their knowledge of the poet's work and evaluate their own pieces.

Class Routine - *See Strategies*

Lesson 1: Introducing Meter-"Jumping Nursery Rhymes and Limericks"

The students will jump rope to nursery rhymes as an introduction to the temporal spacing that occurs when meter and rhythm are used. The students will then apply this concept of rhythm to limerick writing in order to begin learn about the manner in which rhyme and meter effect the way a poem is read.

Lesson 2: Introducing Alliteration - "Post Up!"

The students will be asked to create an alliterated team poem by choosing letters that help to support given thematic prompts, such as "Use the ocean as a metaphor for perseverance." All teams will post their poems and each will be read aloud. Students will vote on the most effective use of alliteration and state why he or she thinks so.

Lesson 3: Introducing Line Break- "Break it up, Break it down!"

After responding to William Carlos Williams' poem "*To a Poor Old Woman*", the students will be asked to create a poem about an everyday event using enjambment techniques.

Lesson 4: Introducing Symbolism through Sound - "Auditory Imagery"

After responding to Paul Lawrence Dunbar's "*We Wear the Mask*" students will be asked to create a poem that creates auditory imagery.

Lesson 5: Introducing Scansion- "Hello, Ms. Charmello. How are you?"

Using a concept attainment method, the title line will be placed on the board and I will ask a few students to read it aloud as I mark the stress symbols. I will then call on a few students, replacing my name with theirs, and each student will be asked to read it aloud. As they speak, I will again mark the stress marks as they read.

Lesson 6: An Introduction to Free Verse - "Are We Ever Really Free?"

After responding to Jimmy Santiago Baca's poem "*Set This Book On Fire*", the students will be asked to create a poem about their life's message. Like Baca, they will use alliteration to create emphasis on important statements.

Lesson 7: Introducing Dialect to Establish Voice - "Wazz'up? Flattery and Familiarity"

Students will listen to Langston Hughes "*Mother to Son*" and will write or draw whatever images are conjured up by this poem. A discussion will ensue regarding the deeper message about children and their caregivers. Students will be asked to generate a list of pop culture slang and use the terms in a flattering poem about the familiarity of an enduring friendship.

Lesson 8: Introducing the Blues

After responding to Eloise Greenfield's "*Way Down in the Music*", the students will be asked to create a poem using a self-created rhythmic pattern without the use of rhyme.

Lesson 9: An Introduction to Dramatic Monologue - "Spell Bound by the Sound"

After responding to Sylvia Plath's poem "*Daddy*", the students will be asked to create a poem about being bound by stereotypes. They will be asked to employ at least two of each technique covered in the lessons above and will be asked to explain what they chose, why they chose them, and how they effect the poem.

Additional "*On Your Own*" Activities

Poem Selection: "*Block City*" by Robert Louis Stevenson

Guiding Question: *How can your imagination help you to persevere?*

The students will be asked to visualize a day in their neighborhood. The teacher should ask for images based on each of the senses. The students will then create two poems that will reflect one another. The first will be a simple concrete poem that describes a present-day favorite object within their neighborhood, such as a tree,

backyard, park swing, etc. The second will be a calligramme in a student-chosen shape that represents how their childhood feelings of life have either changed or come to fruition. This image will be filled with words rather than just having the words outlining it, as in the concrete poem. In addition, the words can be reflective of the image, but not entirely describing fruit.

Standards

(Pennsylvania Communication Standards and Eligible Content)

There are eight categories from which Communication standards are derived. These skill sets are expounded upon in great detail and are sequentially based on grade level. The details of each standard are known as Eligible Content.

Learning to Read Independently

Purposes for Reading Word Recognition Skills Vocabulary Development Comprehension and Interpretation Fluency

Use knowledge of phonics, word analysis (e.g., root words, prefixes and suffixes), syllabication, picture and context clues to decode and understand new words during reading.

Use knowledge of phonics, syllabication, prefixes, suffixes, the dictionary or context clues to decode and understand new words during reading. Use these words accurately in writing and speaking.

Reading Critically in All Content Areas

Detail Inferences Fact from opinion Comparison Analysis and Evaluation

Reading, Analyzing and Interpreting Literature

Literary Elements Literary Devices Poetry Drama

Types of Writing

Narrative Informational Persuasive

Quality of Writing

Focus Content Organization Style Conventions

Speaking and Listening

Listening Skills Speaking Skills Discussion Presentation

Characteristics and Function of the English Language

Word Origins Variations Application

Research

Selection Location of Information Organization

Annotated Bibliography

Alden, R. *An Introduction to Poetry for Students of English Literature*. New York: Henry Holt Company, 1909.

A hard-to-acquire, but easy-to-read reference manual about poetry.

Angelillo, J. *Making Revision Matter*. New York: Scholastic, 2005.

Illustrates revision methods that help students help themselves.

Baca, Jimmy Santiago. *Set This Book on Fire*. -

A collection of poetry by Baca.

Baca, Jimmy Santiago. *What's Happening*. Willimantic, Conn: Curbstone, 1982.

A collection of poetry by Baca.

Baca, Jimmy Santiago. *Working in the Dark: Reflections of a Poet of the Barrio*

Prose by Baca on why and how he writes poetry.

Bolin, F. (Ed.) *Poetry for Young People: Carl Sandburg*. Sterling Publishing Company, New York, NY. 1995.

A student-friendly collection of Sandburg's poems of accompanied by poem supporting artwork.

Copeland, J. *Speaking of Poets: Interviews with Poets Who Write for Children and Young Adults*. Nation Council of English Teachers. 1993.

A seldom-found interview genre of artist speaking to children about life and its affect on writing.

Divakaruni, C. "Writer's Ask". Issue 26. Burmmeister-Brown, S. & Stawson-Davies, L., Ed. Portland, Oregon: Glimmer Train Press, 2005.

A periodical filled with interviews of writers, about writing.

Fletcher, R, Portalupi, J. *Writing Workshop: The Essential Guide*. Portsmouth,NH: Heinemann, c2001.

A guide to creating and managing effective writer's workshops.

Gentry, T. *Paul Laurence Dunbar: Poet*. Chelsea House Publishing. New York, NY. 1989.

A biography of the life of the African-American poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar. Includes photographs.

Kirby, D., Latta, D. Liner, T. Inside Out: Strategies for Teaching Writing (3rd Ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004.

Classroom applications of a process-approach to writing.

Lee, C. "Writer's Ask". Issue 32. Burmeister-Brown, S. & Stawson-Davies, L., Ed. Portland, Oregon: Glimmer Train Press, 2006.

A periodical filled with interviews of writers, about writing.

Soto, Gary. *A Fire in My Hands: A Book of Poems*. Scholastic Press. Logan, Iowa. 1990.

A book of Gary Soto's poetry, as written for children, that includes snippets about the author's intention for writing each of the selections.

Wormser, Baron. *The Poetry Life: Ten Stories*.

A collection of narratives about the personal connections Baron Wormer had with various poets.

Notes

1. Alden, R. 16.

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