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Teaching History through Poetry

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Introduction

Making Europe's Renaissance relevant and accessible to urban youth can be quite a challenge. The geography, art, music, and literature seem so far removed that it can be difficult to give my students an entree into the history and language of that time period. Nevertheless, I have spent the past several years teaching middle school English, and I have found that students learn best when they can use their prior knowledge to make connections to new concepts. Since my students enjoy writing poetry, I will use the Shakespearean sonnet as an introduction as well as a tool for analyzing the Renaissance.

Students will explore the guiding questions, "Why do people write poetry?" and "What can we learn about history through poetry?" Through a series of engaging lessons, students will learn how to read poetry, beginning with familiar forms and then moving on to closely examine a selection of Shakespeare's sonnets and discover what is revealed through the speaker and intended reader about the poems' cultural and historical circumstances. Students will develop the skill of making inferences from poems and then use those inferences to construct historical context, which they will compare with their readings in the history textbook. Finally, students will write a sonnet series of their own which will be discussed by their classmates.

This unit will cover both History and English standards. History standards require students to understand advances made in literature, the arts, science, mathematics; to explain the importance of Florence for the early stages of the Renaissance; and to describe how the "rebirth" brought about an interest in what was called Humanism. English standards addressed in this unit will include analyzing figurative language, identifying various forms of poetry, using context clues to clarify word meaning, analyzing characterization and recurring themes. My rationale for addressing both standards is to develop theme-based cross-curricular units that will allow my students to develop their literacy skills while studying a subject in depth. Instead of separating the two subject areas, developing a unit integrating the two subjects will allow students to develop their literacy skills while deepening their historical understanding.

This four-week unit is intended for my seventh grade Humanities class in a small urban school where over half of the student population qualifies for free or reduced lunch. The majority of my students are African American, and several other backgrounds are also represented in my classroom, including Latino, South Asian, and Yemeni students. My classes are inclusive of students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) as

well as English Language Learners (ELLs), and I have a range of skill levels from several years below grade level to high achieving students.

Objectives

First, students will analyze Maya Angelou's poem "Still I Rise" and Gary Soto's "Ode to Los Raspados" by considering the speaker, intended reader, theme, figurative language, and historical background. I selected these poems because students will find them engaging and understandable. Students will need to recognize that the speaker and writer are not necessarily the same person. As they read, they will learn the concept of theme. Figurative language will be analyzed as students discuss the comparisons made and why the writers selected those particular metaphors and similes. The final component of analyzing these poems will be to extrapolate from what the poems say to their historical and cultural settings.

Once students have learned how to read and analyze poems, they will identify the characteristics of Shakespeare's Sonnet 29 and carry over the tools of analysis gained from their study of the Maya Angelou and Gary Soto poems. Students will deepen their understanding of poetry by explaining the role of structure, alliteration, and rhyme. They will understand the form of a Shakespearean sonnet. Based on their analysis of the sonnet, students will make inferences about Renaissance culture.

By this means students will begin making educated guesses about the general characteristics of the Renaissance. After they have made their inferences based on the sonnet, they will read about the Renaissance in their textbook. They will compare their inferences to what it says in the book and then reread the poem to see if they can find other connections they had not discovered upon the first reading. At this point in the unit, I will introduce another sonnet, and students will understand the basic protocol for reading and discussing a poem. As they read the sonnet, they will come to notice the ways in which the poem is a cultural artifact of the Renaissance yet also contains universal themes we can still relate to.

Reading about the Renaissance will give students a basic understanding of the time period, but I want them also to examine the circumstances under which this "rebirth" took place. They will explore cause and effect relationships found in expository texts concerning what led to the Renaissance. Many of California's English Language Arts standards for the seventh grade focus on expository text, so it will be crucial for my students to have the skills to independently read this form of writing.

Next, students will compare and contrast the Middle Ages with the Renaissance. Students will have already studied the Middle Ages in a previous unit, and the period will have resurfaced in their discussions of what led to the Renaissance. They will now take some time to reflect upon the similarities and differences between the two periods, relating these similarities and differences to the cause and effect relationship explored in the previous objective. Once again, students will come back to the sonnet to reinforce their understanding of the Renaissance.

My final content objective is for students to understand the form of a sonnet sufficiently to create their own sonnets. Students will be assigned characters that they will need to bring to life as speakers of their poems. This will require students to think critically and deeply about their word choices, finding figurative language suited to the time period.

In addition to these content objectives, I will also address language objectives to meet the needs of all students, especially my English Learners. My first language objective is for students to get used to certain specialized descriptive terms when discussing content. In addition, I want them to learn content-related vocabulary. I have noticed that my students are able to quickly grasp concepts, but they don't often know the words to articulate those concepts. Content related words that students will need to learn include: sonnet, iambic pentameter, speaker, tone, mood, metaphor, simile, personification, volta, Renaissance, Humanism, secular, city-state, republic, and patron. Teaching students necessary vocabulary will help them engage in well-informed discussions throughout their education and increase their performance on standardized tests.

Background

Teachers will need background knowledge concerning both the historical context and the pertinent poetry in order to teach this unit. This unit also assumes that students have some prior knowledge—for example of the Middle Ages and of the general concept of cultural periods. It is designed for an inclusive classroom, so strategies for differentiating curriculum within a diverse group will be presented later. The information needed for each of the objectives will be presented in chronological order below.

"Still I Rise" by Maya Angelou

Maya Angelou's poem, "Still I Rise," was published in a 1978 collection of poetry of the same title. Giving students some information about her life may help students engage more in a discussion about whether she is the speaker of the poem. Maya Angelou was born in 1928 in St. Louis, Missouri, and during her childhood she lived with her grandmother. Her novel, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, describes how literature and the spoken word helped Marguerite rise up from a five year period of being mute after she was sexually assaulted as a child by her mother's boyfriend. The novel's setting in the segregated South allows Angelou to demonstrate resistance to racism within the context of that time period and geography, while at the same time creating a piece of writing that can resonate with many. Angelou's life and literature demonstrate the resilience reflected in her poem "Still I Rise."

Students will need to understand that the speaker of the poem is not necessarily the author. The term speaker refers to the voice that expresses what is said in the poem. In their study of literature, students might be familiar with the term narrator. I will use this background knowledge to help them understand the concept of the speaker. Just as an author creates a character called the narrator to tell a story, a poet creates a character known as the speaker. Students will use their knowledge of characterization to describe the speaker. They will make inferences about the speaker's character traits based on word choice and tone. Angelou's speaker refers to herself as "I," and there is also an intended reader directly addressed as "you."

In order to effectively analyze figurative language, students need to be familiar with the concepts of metaphor and simile. "Still I Rise" is a poem full of comparison, and students should be able to identify the types of figurative language used and consider how they shape the meaning, exploring the writer's possible rationale in choosing certain comparisons. This exploration of figurative language can lead to a rich discussion about not only the meaning, but also her choice of words.

The comparisons used in this poem also allow us to make inferences about the historical context. For

example, Angelou expresses, "I walk like I've got oil wells pumping in my living room." This comparison is indicative of what resources are considered valuable in our world today. Since oil is a valuable resource to us, students can discuss why somebody who has oil wells pumping in her living room would walk in a different way from somebody who has something of little value in today's world. She ends the poem with the following metaphor with broad historical resonance, "Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave, I am the dream and the hope of the slave, I rise, I rise, I rise."

"Ode to Los Raspados" by Gary Soto

I chose Gary Soto's "Ode to Los Raspados" because it is exemplifies a speaker who is clearly not the author. This poem is written from the point of view of a young girl whose father drives an ice cream truck. Students will be able to see how the "I" in this poem is not Gary Soto, but a speaker that he has created to express this poem. This poem is also full of imagery, so students can also how imagery is used in poetry.

This poem is found in Gary Soto's collection titled *Neighborhood Odes*. The odes are celebrations of Mexican-American culture from the point of view of young people. Gary Soto's short stories and poems are found in many state adopted textbooks, so students may already be familiar with his work.

The Sonnet

After analyzing Angelou and Soto's poems, students will begin their study of the sonnet. The word sonnet comes from the word sonneto, meaning "little song" in Italian. It refers to a form of poetry that became popular in 14 th century Italy. Francesco Petrarch, an Italian poet and humanist, popularized this form of poetry. A Petrarchan sonnet consists of fourteen lines divided into an octet, the first eight lines, and a sestet, the last six lines. The sestet begins with what is called a volta, or turn, which signifies a shift in the tone of the poem. The octet often poses a problem, while the sestet offers resolution. The rhyme scheme of a Petrarchan sonnet is ABBAABBA CDECDE.

Petrarch lived near Florence from 1304-1374 during the early Renaissance. He is often referred to as the "Father of Humanism." The term Humanism refers to the values arising during the Renaissance that came from a revival in the study of classical literature. He challenged the prevailing form of education and advocated a return to classical studies, asserting that they could exist alongside Christian spirituality. Petrarch was especially drawn to the Roman philosopher and rhetorician Cicero. His work emphasized self-awareness, human virtues, and secularism.

Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, brought this form of poetry to England in the early 16 th century. They translated Italian sonnets into English. Sir Philip Sidney's sonnet sequence *Astrophil and Stella* blazed the trail for sonnet sequences by others, including William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, and Samuel Daniel.

William Shakespeare wrote poetry and plays in the 16 th and 17 th centuries. Shakespeare's known works include thirty-seven plays and 154 sonnets. There is a lot of inconclusive speculation as to the identities of the intended readers. Like Petrarchan sonnets, Shakespearean sonnets also have fourteen lines. However, the form differs. In a Shakespearean sonnet, the rhyme scheme is ABAB CDCD EFEF GG. The turn in a Shakespearean sonnet is usually found at the beginning of the couplet. The sonnets are written in iambic pentameter, which means that each line has ten syllables broken down into 5 sets of stressed and unstressed syllables.

In *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye*, Joel Fineman argues that Shakespeare invented a new form of subjectivity and breaks away from the traditional form of epideictic poetry, the poetry of praise. Shakespeare writes sonnets about praise rather than to praise. The praise itself is objectified along with the object of praise. In the first 126 sonnets, the speaker is self-conscious about the nature and conditions of his praise. The praise in sonnets 127 through 152 is referred to as the "poetry of praise paradox." In these sonnets, , the speaker doubts whether the reader is worthy of praise or not. This self-awareness reflects the self-awareness that was characteristic of the Renaissance.

Sonnet 29 begins by describing the speaker's unfortunate public life. The first two quatrains express his loneliness and hopelessness over being an outcast. He compares himself to others who are more fortunate, and he envies them. In the third quatrain, the speaker shifts his focus to a forgotten aspect of his personal life and speaks of his beloved. Even though his public life is tragic, he is fortunate in his private life because of the wealth brought by the intended reader's "sweet love." In *Themes and Variations in Shakespeare's Sonnets*, J.B. Leishman points out the theme of compensation apparent here that comes up in a few of Shakespeare's sonnets. The speaker's contemplation of the intended reader serves as compensation for everything that he lacks.

Historical Context

The Middle Ages

After the fall of the western half of the Roman Empire, Christianity spread north of the Alps. There was both conflict and cooperation between the Papacy and monarchs. The Roman Catholic Church had tremendous influence over the lives of people because of its political and intellectual role. Medieval life was dominated by the Church, which was very wealthy and powerful. The influence of the Church can be seen in the intellectual ideas of the period, such as Thomas Aquinas's theology. Religious themes dominated the arts.

During this time, feudalism developed and was the system used to maintain political order. The structure, which allowed the upper classes to maintain their power, consisted of kings, lords, and peasants. The prevalent belief at the time was of the divine right of kings. Kings were given authority directly from God to rule their subjects in the same way that spiritual authority was given to the Church. In order to maintain power, kings gave certain privileges to lords in exchange for loyalty and service. Lords would receive land, called a fief. Both the noble class and the Church demanded a lot of the peasants. The Church had to pay the lords to use their land, and the peasants were exploited for the labor and felt obligated to give part of their earnings to the Church in hopes of a better after-life.

Even though this time period was referred to as the "Dark Ages" by Petrarch, there were actually some significant developments during this era. Today we distinguish between the Dark Ages and the Middle Ages, the Dark Ages referring to the time period from the 3 rd to around the 11 th and 12 th centuries and the Middle Ages from the end of the Dark Ages until the Renaissance. The Silk Road was reopened when the Mongols held power in China, allowing for an exchange of goods and ideas between Asia and Europe. Chinese inventions, like the compass, gunpowder, and printing, were accessible to people in Europe. The idea of habeas corpus, a prisoner's right to challenge the reason for imprisonment, was conceptualized in England during the Middle Ages.

The bubonic plague spread from Asia to Europe, having a significant impact on feudalism. The bubonic plague, also knows as the Black Death, spread in the mid 1300s. Europe's population severely declined. There were peasant revolts due to decreased wages despite increased workloads resulting from the smaller population.

When landowners died, peasants would often take over the land. This led to the peasants having more power, and led to the decline of feudalism.

Students will not study poetry from the Middle Ages, but they will read poetry from the Renaissance and understand why those poems do not reflect the Middle Ages. This will strengthen students' understanding of the time period and their ability to closely read poetry.

The Renaissance

Florence was important during the early stages of the Renaissance. At this time, more wealth came into the hands of merchants and bankers, resulting in more people wanting to enjoy their wealth and live for themselves. Even though life was saturated by religion, it was not the most important thing. Secularism was rising. Also the Medici family, one of the wealthiest families in Europe during that time, held much political power in Florence. The family encouraged the spread of Humanism and the arts. The Renaissance spread to other parts of Europe owing to trade and an exchange of ideas made possible by the printing press.

The Renaissance was characterized by a renewed interest in classical studies, which resulted in a revival of Humanism. During the Middle Ages, scholasticism was the method of learning. Scholasticism was based on reasoning, natural law, and theology. This changed during the Renaissance when scholasticism was replaced by Humanism. Humanism involved the study of poetry, rhetoric, and history, studies cultivated with the hope of making people better citizens.

During this time, there were many advances made in literature, art, science, and mathematics. The invention of the printing press facilitated these advances because ideas could be disseminated more widely and quickly. The medical field advanced as a result of this information being spread in conjunction with Gabriel Harvey's discovery of the circulation of blood and detailed drawings of the human body, such as those created by Leonardo da Vinci. Despite the taboo on human dissection, Vesalius secretly dissected humans and wrote books leading to a better understanding of anatomy.

Since so much of this unit focuses on Shakespeare's sonnets, I will spend some time focusing on the historical context in England during his time. Queen Elizabeth I reigned from 1558 to 1603. The Church of England was established, and the country was rising as a commercial power. Shakespeare lived in London, which was a commercial and cultural center. Because of their increased prosperity, people had more money to spend on the arts. Theater became popular and was accompanied by secular music and dance. The plays needed to be approved by a censor who was appointed by Queen Elizabeth. Shakespeare's work reflects the time in part through its use of rhetoric, such as irony and hyperbole.

Strategies

Audio-visual recordings of poetry

Having students listen to a recording or watch a video of a poetry reading will engage them and provide access to the course content for struggling students. While students listen or watch, they should always be urged to keep their minds focused on a task. Students should be provided with a copy of the text. Some examples of listening tasks include underlining words that the poet emphasized, identifying figurative

language, or underlining words that suggest mood. This strategy will help students understand how a poem is meant to be read. This strategy would work well to introduce the Maya Angelou and Gary Soto poems. Students can listen and note examples of imagery and figurative language on their copies of the poems.

Preview and Predict

This is a pre-reading strategy designed as an anticipatory exercise before reading a poem or selection from the textbook. Students will be paired off, and each student will receive a line from the poem or textbook selection. Students will read their individual lines and work as a pair to make a prediction about the poem. The pairs will then share their predictions with the entire class. The predictions will be posted in the classroom. After reading the poem or selection, students will compare their predictions with the text once they've read it. This strategy will be especially useful before reading the sonnet. Students might have difficulty approaching the whole poem, and this task of focusing on one line and sharing with the whole group will serve as a way to scaffold.

Venn Diagram

A Venn Diagram is a tool to help students compare and contrast information. Students learn better if they can make connections, and I often ask them to compare and contrast concepts to deepen their understanding. Venn Diagrams can also serve as a tool to organize thoughts before completing a writing exercise. At such points the diagram can be used to have students elaborate on the similarities and differences between two pieces of writing, time periods, or characters. As students compare and contrast the Renaissance and Middle Ages, the Venn Diagram will help them organize their thoughts.

Two Column Notes

This is a system of note-taking that allows students to organize information by keeping main ideas and headings on the left and details on the right. Students summarize at the bottom of the page the information they gained from the notes. As students read from their textbooks, this strategy will help them organize and summarize information. These notes will also serve as a tool to help them study and review information.

Structured Discussions of Key Terms

Students need meaningful ways to practice new vocabulary words. Flashcards and memorization might give them some familiarity, but in order to truly internalize a word and understand how to use it, students need practice. Structured discussions provide scaffolding and context for students to use new vocabulary words. Students are first provided direct definitions. They are then given examples and practice with the teacher, paying close attention to the part of speech and syntax. Then they are given sentence frames with meaningful context through which they can practice using the words. Structured discussions can help students talk about poems in a meaningful way. Students will be given a protocol including questions and sentence frames containing vocabulary that they need to internalize to show their mastery of the content.

Cloze

A cloze passage is a selection in which certain words are omitted. Students need to carefully read the passage and use context clues to determine which words should go in the blank. This strategy can be modified to provide clues for students who need them by giving them a word bank. A cloze passage is an effective way to monitor comprehension and challenge students to read carefully and critically. This strategy is useful to help

students read closely as they will need to demonstrate a certain level of understanding to fill in the blanks. The blanks can also be strategically selected to target a particular skill. For example, when analyzing figurative language, words can be taken out of similes and metaphors to see if students can select words that are appropriate to the meaning and cultural context of the poems.

Character journals

Students are assigned a particular character (historical or fictional), and they write first-person journal entries from that character's point of view. Students are given specific journal prompts related to events or problems, and they write using as much detail as possible. After students are finished writing, they read these entries aloud. Since students are assigned different characters, the readings provide a rich sampling of different perspectives responding to the same topic. This strategy can help students understand characterization as they read poetry. For example, as students read Gary Soto's "Ode to Los Raspados," they can write journal entries from different points of view. Students may be assigned to write from the point of view of the speaker, her father, or another child waiting referred to in the poem. This strategy can also help students understand historical circumstance. They can be given a fictional prompt related to history. For instance, students might be assigned different characters such as a peasant, a lord, the king, etc., and write about one situation from these different points of view.

Gallery Walk

Students are divided into small groups, and in the room there are as many posters with questions on them as there are groups. The questions on the posters concern different aspects of a common reading assignment. For example, one poster might pose questions about characters while another addresses vocabulary and yet another asks students about historical context. Each group will receive a limited amount of time at each poster to respond to the questions. Once time is up, the group rotates to the next poster, reads what the group(s) prior to them wrote, and adds to or revises the answer on the poster. This strategy will work well to review a poem or concept from the textbook. Students should have spent a few lessons studying the topic, and the gallery walk serves as a tool to reinforce material through group work and whole class review.

Classroom Activities

The classroom activities described below are a chronological sampling from the unit that meet the specified objectives using some of the strategies listed above.

Sample Lesson 1:

Begin the lesson with a Do Now activity. Ask students to complete the following task: What is the difference between prose and poetry? Create a Venn Diagram to explore the similarities and differences. After students have a chance to explore their ideas, call on students to share and create a Venn Diagram that can be displayed on the wall during this unit.

Tell students that they will be studying poetry and history together in this unit to gain a deeper understanding of what they can learn about history through poetry. The first two poems they will study in this unit will not be related to the content in their history books, but will serve as an example of how to extrapolate historical and

cultural context through poems.

At this point in the year, students will already be familiar with figurative language. Take some time to quickly review these concepts. Distribute copies of Maya Angelou's poem "Still I Rise" and tell students that they will be watching a video of Angelou expressing this poem. As students watch, they should pay attention to how punctuation is used differently in poetry than prose and complete the graphic organizer below.

Comparison	Type of figurative language	What does the speaker mean?

Ask students to share what they noticed about the role of punctuation in this poem. Have a few volunteers practice reading this poem to the class. Then ask them to share their responses on the graphic organizers. Engage students in a discussion about the choices Maya Angelou makes when writing similes and metaphors. Why does she select those comparisons over others? What is revealed about the historical and cultural context?

Teach students the terms speaker and author, making sure that they understand that the speaker and author are not necessarily the same person. Distribute copies of a short biography of Maya Angelou. Ask students to read the biography with a partner and write a paragraph responding to the prompt, Is Maya Angelou the speaker of the poem "Still I Rise?" Justify your answer. Select a few students to share responses.

Close the lesson by viewing the video once again, this time asking students to add to their graphic organizers. As a homework assignment, students should complete the following worksheet to review the material covered in class.

1.I read the poem _____ by _____.

2.The difference between the speaker and author is _____.

3.I believe the speaker of this poem is _____ because
_____.

4.I can make the following inferences about the historical and cultural context (provide the line numbers that helped you make each inference):

a.

b.

c.

5.Paraphrase the poem.

Sample Lesson 2:

This lesson takes place after students have had a chance to read both the Maya Angelou and Gary Soto poems. This is an introduction to the Shakespearean sonnet. By the end of this lesson, students should be able to understand the structure of a sonnet and make some inferences about the historical and cultural context of Sonnet 29.

Begin the lesson by asking students to do a quick write about what they can learn about historical and cultural context by reading a poem. Give students about five minutes to gather their thoughts and ask a few students to share. Students should refer to the inferences made after reading the Angelou and Soto poems.

Tell students that they will begin reading a poem that was written during the historical period they will study next. Put students in pairs to complete a preview and predict activity. Give each student a line from Sonnet 29. Since there are only fourteen lines, there will be repeats, but that will be fine to have more than one pair make inferences based on the same lines. Have each student read the line to his or her partner. Ask students to respond to the following questions: What did you notice about the lines? What do you predict the entire poem will be about?

After students have shared with their partners, ask each pair to read the lines as well as their predictions to the class. Chart the predictions so students may check them later. Make sure that students justify their predictions so that they are closely reading and basing their responses on the text.

Next, tell students that the type of poem they are about to read is a sonnet. Teach students the basic structure of a Shakespearean sonnet so that they understand the rhyming pattern and couplet. Show them an example of another sonnet pointing out the structural features.

Give each pair a set of all fourteen lines cut out from Sonnet 29. Give them the challenge of putting the lines together in order according to the structure of a sonnet. After giving pairs some time to work on this, solicit student help and reconstruct the sonnet using large strips for the whole class to see. Allow students to make mistakes as they offer help, making the self-correct by referring back to the structure of the sonnet and /or logic.

Once the sonnet has been reconstructed, tell students that they will go back to the process of making inferences now that they have the entire poem in front of them. Ask students to complete the first two columns of the following graphic organizer as they read Sonnet 29. Ask students to hold on to this organizer as they will refer to it in a future lesson.

Inference about historical/cultural context	Justify your inference	Was your inference correct (provide evidence from the textbook)?

Sample Lesson 3:

In this lesson, students will learn about the Renaissance and make connections between historical context and poetry. Students will read about the Renaissance in their history textbooks and take notes using Two Column Notes.

Begin the lesson by asking students to review what they learned about the Middle Ages. Ask students to make a list of some characteristics of the Middle Ages. Have students share and chart their responses on the board. Tell students that they will learn about the Renaissance, which is the time period during which Sonnet 29 was written. Have students read and complete notes using a structure like the one I have included below.

Title:

Main Ideas/Headings	Details

Summary:

When students finish taking notes, ask them to take out the graphic organizers on which they recorded their inferences. Tell students to complete the third column, which asks them to check the inferences they made about the historical period they read about.

Sample Lesson 4:

This lesson will give students the opportunity to think more deeply about the relationship between history and poetry. In the lessons between the one outlined above and this one, students will study the causes and effects of the Renaissance. In this lesson, they will compare and contrast the Renaissance and Middle Ages.

Begin the lesson by having students complete a Venn Diagram comparing and contrasting the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Chart responses on a large Venn Diagram for the whole class to see.

After reviewing the Venn Diagram, put students in groups of 5 and have them complete a gallery walk. The gallery walk should consist of 6 large posters with questions posted and room for students to write responses. Each group will receive five minutes to respond to each poster. Students will rotate, answering questions that the previous group(s) did not have time to address and commenting on the responses already given. Each group should be given a different colored writing utensil in order to make sure that they respond to each poster. Two posters should be about each of the time periods. Another poster should be a response to poetry. For the next two posters, students should be given poems they have not seen before and answer questions about the speaker, intended reader, and historical circumstance. The last two posters should refer to content vocabulary, asking students to elaborate and give examples of words covered in the text.

As a homework assignment leading into the next lesson, students should create an outline for a compare and contrast essay.

Sample Lesson 5:

Students will demonstrate their understanding by writing original sonnets written from the perspective of an assigned speaker. They will address a specific reader using appropriate figurative language and references. In order to prepare for this assignment, students will need to do some prewriting exercises, such as character journals, to understand the characterization of each speaker. In this lesson, students will use their prewriting exercises to write original sonnets.

Begin the class by asking students to review the structure of a sonnet. Tell students that they will use their character journals to help them write original sonnets. Please refer to the Strategies section above for more details about the character journals. Students should think of an intended reader and write a poem expressing something to that reader. The following handout can help students organize their thoughts before writing the poem.

The speaker of my poem is…

The intended reader is…

This is how the historical context affects my speaker…

The message my speaker will express is…

Some imagery that is historically relevant and can help me communicate my message includes…

After students organize their thoughts, they can start writing sonnets. Some students will need significantly more time than others. As students finish, they can peer revise, checking for accuracy in terms of form and content.

To conclude the unit, organize a poetry reading and have students perform their sonnets.

Resources

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Shakespeare, William, Edward Hubler, Northrop Frye, Leslie A. Fiedler, Stephen Spender, R. P. Blackmur, and Oscar Wilde. *The Riddle of Shakespeare's Sonnets.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962.

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Appendix

The following California standards for 7 th grade are covered in this unit:

English Language Arts

Reading 1.1 Identify idioms, analogies, metaphors, and similes in prose and poetry

Reading 1.3 Clarify word meaning through the use of definition, example, restatement, or contrast

Reading 2.3 Analyze text which uses cause and effect patterns

Reading 3.3 Analyze characterization as delineated through a character's thoughts, words, speech patterns, and actions; the narrator's description; and what other characters think, say, and do

Writing 2.2 Write responses to literature that develop interpretations which exhibit careful reading, understanding, and insight; and organize interpretations around several clear ideas, premises, or images; and justify interpretations through sustained use of examples and textual evidence

Social Studies

7.6 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the civilizations of Medieval Europe.

2. Describe the spread of Christianity north of the Alps and the roles played by the early church and by monasteries in its diffusion after the fall of the western half of the Roman Empire.

3. Understand the development of feudalism, its role in the medieval European economy, the way in which it was influenced by physical geography, and how feudal relationships provided the foundation of political order.

7. Map the spread of the bubonic plague from Central Asia to China, the Middle East, and Europe and describe its impact on global population.

8. Understand the importance of the Catholic church as a political, intellectual, and aesthetic institution

7.8 Students analyze the origins, accomplishments, and geographic diffusion of the Renaissance.

1. Describe the way in which the revival of classical learning and the arts fostered a new interest in humanism (i.e., a balance between intellect and religious faith).

2. Explain the importance of Florence in the early stages of the Renaissance and the growth of independent trading cities (e.g., Venice), with emphasis on the cities' impor tance in the spread of Renaissance ideas.

3. Understand the effects of the reopening of the ancient "Silk Road" between Europe and China, including Marco Polo's travels and the location of his routes.

4. Describe the growth and effects of new ways of disseminating information (e.g., the ability to manufacture paper, translation of the Bible into the vernacular, printing).

5. Detail advances made in literature, the arts, science, mathematics, cartography, engi neering, and the understanding of human anatomy and astronomy (e.g., by Dante Alighieri, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo di Buonarroti Simoni, Johann Gutenberg, William Shakespeare).