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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2011 Volume II: Love and Politics in the Sonnet

From Inquiry to Interpretation: A Passage through the Sonnet

Curriculum Unit 11.02.05, published September 2011

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"The teacher who is indeed wise does not bid you to enter the house of his wisdom but rather leads you to the threshold of your mind." –Khalil Gibran

Why study sonnets? But more importantly, why study Shakespearean sonnets? There are many reasons to study Shakespeare's work. First, Shakespeare is known as one of the greatest writers of English Literature. This is because Shakespeare was a person who strove to understand nature, things, and people. His work transcends time; he was able to see beyond his time and to write for every generation, and thus we remain inspired by him throughout the centuries. Although Shakespeare devoted himself to theatre as evidenced by many of his amazing plays, he also wrote alluring and exquisite sonnets which deal mostly with love: a theme certainly not limited by time. These sonnets are not only pleasurable to read, but they touch the heart of everyone who reads them. The language used: words, phrases, and images empower us to understand the sonnet holistically. We use every ounce of our being, essentially, all our senses: taste, touch, hear, smell, and sight to comprehend what is being conveyed and we learn to connect with ourselves, the speaker, and the world at large. The study of the sonnet is not an easy one, but doing so enables us to think critically, to achieve our own intellectual independence, and to foster delight in the process of learning.

Hubbard High School consists of 1,800 students, of which 90% are Latinos. These Latino students come from a background where the focus is the work place; education takes second place, sometimes third. They have parents who struggle in order to be able to support the household. In some cases, both parents are not home when the children arrive from school. These children must learn to raise themselves, and often the eldest child will raise the other children. They must deal with making dinner, cleaning the house, doing laundry, and all the other things that make a family work. Sadly enough, school work becomes a luxury, not a priority. In many cases, these children are forced to get jobs. I have had several students in my classes who worked 50 hours per week or more; many others had part-time jobs to help support their parents and siblings. For these children, school is more a place where they can just get by; they have neither the energy nor the skill set to academically succeed. This means that most of my students are very poor readers, writers, and essentially, thinkers!

As an educator in this high school, I carefully consider these elements in my students' lives when I develop my curriculum and lesson plans. I strive not only to reach these students academically, but also to make their lives in school easier than they are at home. One of my main objectives is to teach students the power of independence: autonomy, life skills, and strategies that they can utilize anytime and anywhere. As a result, my lesson plans are designed to make learning relevant, fun, accessible, feasible, and engaging. However,

while my objective is to engage students, I am also aware that these students need a structured environment which fosters independence, comprehension and effective thinking skills.

Designing curriculum and lesson plans with these goals in mind can be challenging both academically and mentally. The focus of the unit is determined by its ability to engage, its challenging components, and its relevance to these students' lives. Additionally, each unit contains elements of the Socratic Seminar, which guides students in finding the answers by allowing them the opportunity for critical thinking, a higher level of thinking which is often propelled by guiding questions. The answers to those questions must come from the students themselves, not the teacher!

The idea of lesson planning is to use time not cautiously but wisely. It is important to set aside enough time to teach the basics, such as unfamiliar vocabulary or context details. Whenever I teach a poem or a story I know that if I want to spend ten minutes reading the poem then I will need an extra six to eight minutes for vocabulary. I can then give my students 10 to 12 minutes to answer the assigned questions, which allows me 30 minutes for the rest of the class: discussion. I am strict about the time that I allot for students' individual or group work because I want them to get their work completed. The time allotted gives them a sense of structure and enhances their focus.

However, when planning a unit, I am careful to avoid micromanaging. It is up to the students to provide the answers, not the teacher. As freshmen, my students are more than old enough to understand the concept of autonomy. I strive to give them freedom of thought, freedom of expression, and freedom of questioning. Questioning is an important exercise because sometimes the only way I know that students are learning is when they question me about the lesson, or ask about the text that we are reading. In my classroom, I stress connecting with the text and the author, questioning the text and the author, and having an answer that relates to the question posed. Students will realize quickly that it is perfectly acceptable for them to have any answer as long as they can back it up with evidence. The point of all this insistence is that they are encouraged to dig deep, and to think critically!

Flexibility of expectation on teacher's part is also an important factor when designing a lesson, owing to the fact that at any given moment the class may arrive at a "teachable moment" and the teacher can then seize the occasion to drive home the main ideas.

One important unit in the freshmen curriculum is poetry. For people who are not familiar with it, poetry can be a daunting experience. To avoid bogging down yet still maintaining an effective learning environment where students are actively participating and thinking, I have to become creative. This leads to the idea of teaching the sonnet.

What students don't know (or don't care to know) is that poets have been writing sonnets for over 450 years. In his book, *Great Sonnets*; Paul Negri explains the origins of the sonnet. The sonnet was originally called the *little song or sonetto*, which originated in Italy in the thirteenth century. Although Guittone di Arezzo, also known as Giacomo da Lentino, invented the form in 1235 A.D, Dante was responsible for establishing its importance as a literary form in the fourteenth century. He wrote twenty five sonnets, all of them devoted to his beloved Beatrice. The sonnet form was established even more firmly by Dante's countryman, Petrarch, who wrote over three hundred sonnets. This form of writing poetry was so successful that it was later adopted by many countries in Europe.¹

The English sonnet form was introduced to England in the 1530's by Henry Howard (The Earl of Surrey) and Sir Thomas Wyatt. Other poets started writing the sonnet and the form was accepted and copied throughout

England resulting in what Negri calls the "sonnet craze." ² During the middle of the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, the sonnet became less popular although certain poets had a strong and learned interest in them. These poets include Milton, Thomas Gray, William Lisle Bowles, and Charlotte Smith. However, the sonnet became favored again at the end of the eighteenth century, and between then and the present, the sonnet has remained very popular. Continued interest in the sonnet over the centuries confirms its success as a form.

John Fuller refers to the sonnet as "the best known and most versatile of the free-standing verse forms, alive and well..." ³ So why is the sonnet so popular? Why teach the sonnet? Because my students' attention span for reading and writing is limited, teaching the sonnet will, in essence, allow me to teach intricately developed ideas in a brief space that they can traverse. The brevity of the sonnet is what makes it powerful. Thus, I am going to teach the form of the sonnet and how the power of compression exerted by the form enhances its meaning. Of course the brevity of the sonnet is somewhat deceptive, concealing some of the most profound thoughts ever uttered, but hopefully the shortness of the poem will help motivate the students to perform the difficult analysis that must follow.

Sonnets are fun to teach because their brevity calls attention without strain to the power and complexity of individual words and phrases. The use of metaphors and similes to portray different meanings, sometimes confusing, other times straightforward, is also inspiring. Drawing attention to metaphors and similes is also very effective for visualizing, which is an important reading strategy. The form of the sonnet itself is instinctively appealing to students. Fuller remarks that "The beauty of the Italian form has been ascribed to its similarities to Platonic or Pythagorean musical ratios that were also incorporated into classical architecture and is frequently described as a natural organic structure, like an acorn in its cup.." ⁴

The turns of thought, especially in Petrarchan sonnets, explore elements in life that are mysterious and sometimes unfathomable, such as love, life, pain, loss, and change. The short and manageable form of the sonnet releases thought into broad spaces. I want the students to see this and realize that there is great freedom in short speech. Students should understand that to gain a reader's attention, one must play powerfully and skillfully with words. It is a skill that is worth pursuing and it can be achieved with practice.

This unit will teach students the main components of sonnets. They will become adept at answering questions such as: What is a sonnet? What are the different types of sonnets? What are the main characteristics of a sonnet? What makes an effective sonnet? What are the arguments, thoughts, and ideas presented in a sonnet? Are the ideas altered or sustained and what effect(s) do the varied courses of argument have on the sonnet? What is the speaker's solution to a posed problem if there is one or what alteration of thought takes place in the sonnet? Finally, who is the speaker in the sonnet, and who is the intended reader of that particular sonnet, and is that reader the same as the addressed reader? The final objective of this unit is to teach students to write sonnets. When students write their own sonnets, they will gain a connection, not only to sonnets, but to other types of poetry. Through writing poetry, students will gain fluency and become adept at effective word choice. They will also gain confidence because they will know that their writing is developing. These skills will help them in all genres of writing.

There are different types of sonnets; two are Shakespearean (English) and Petrarchan(Italian). Both types usually have 14 lines. The Shakespearean has three sections called quatrains with a couplet added. In Shakespearean sonnets, the three quatrains contain four lines each and use an alternating rhyme scheme while the concluding couplet contains two rhyming lines. Students will understand that the rhyme scheme of a Shakespearean sonnet is abab/cdcd/efef/gg. This contrasts with a Petrarchan sonnet, which is divided into two

sections by two different groups of rhyming sounds. The first 8 lines are called the octave and the rhyme scheme is abbaabba. The remaining 6 lines is called the sestet and can have either two or three rhyming sounds, arranged in a variety of ways: cddcdc/ cddcdc/ cdecde/cdcede,etc. Students will then explore the difference in meanings that the specific rhyme schemes convey in themselves. Why are rhyme schemes important in the forms of sonnets? What makes them effective? How can the differing schemes imply different meanings? Why do some sonnets follow the traditional form, while others are unique or defy convention. Does this really affect the readings of the sonnets, or does "defying the norm" give the reader a better understanding of the content?

Students will learn to identify and explain the difference between a Shakespearean sonnet, a Spenserian sonnet, an Envelope sonnet and a Petrarchan sonnet on their own. However, they will deal mostly with the Shakespearean and Petrarchan sonnets. Students will also learn to compare and contrast both by identifying and following closely the ideas presented in both. Finally, students will write their own sonnets utilizing the sonnet elements. They will write both a Shakespearean and a Petrarchan sonnet.

Since Shakespeare wrote some of the best sonnets, we will start the unit by reading some of his. The first sonnet we will read and the one that students will recognize immediately (since they will have read the play), is the "*Romeo and Juliet sonnet*", from Act One, scene five. Romeo and Juliet have just met(in fact, Romeo does not yet know Juliet's name nor does he know her family, and Juliet does not know Romeo or his family) and yet, they feel a burning desire to express their love for each other. Although this sonnet may seem only to be expressing the love of two young, inexperienced adolescents who suddenly find themselves filled with passion and excitement (Romeo claims that he has never felt love like this before) the meaning is much deeper. This sonnet is filled with religious language that implies Juliet to be a saint and Romeo a man who wishes to absolve his sins. He tries to convince her that by kissing him, she is relieving him of those sins. Juliet- the saint- agrees to let him kiss her and thus Romeo is absolved. We will use this embedded sonnet to examine the traditional form of a sonnet and what Shakespeare was trying to convey with this sonnet. We will also use this sonnet to show how the rhyme scheme adds to the burning passion of the lovers and also to explain how metaphors are used to convey meaning.

We will also read Shakespeare' *Sonnet 29* as a class. This poem talks about a man (we are guessing Shakespeare) who is initially unhappy, possibly because he is out of work (students will have studied a little about Shakespeare's background, and most students will know about the closing of the theatres in 1592). Upon thinking of his lover, however, the man immediately comes to the realization that he is better off than most men and would not exchange his life for that of any other. The point of reading this poem is for students to recognize the change of attitude that this poem presents; it starts off with pain and anguish, continues with some insecurity, then ends with a tone of hope. This is the circle of life for many of these students, and I am hoping that they can find a connection and utilize sonnets as a way to express their anguish in life.

It is only fitting, then to read Shakespeare's *Sonnet 18* because this sonnet describes love so powerfully. Love is a timeless concept and applies to everyone, especially students of this age. They will appreciate and recognize Shakespeare's skill in depicting a person who feels love so keenly. The speaker says, "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate." Since men do not often praise a woman for her "temperance," the speaker can only mean that this woman is better than a "summer's day" which is often depicted as a very beautiful and perfect day. The speaker then mentions that the summer months are short and pass by very quickly as does the beauty of a person which declines through nature: "ev'ry fair from fair sometimes declines." Note that "fair" is a noun meaning beauty. However, having said this, the speaker then changes course to say "But thy eternal summer shall not fade," meaning that his lover's

beauty will never decline (at least, not in his eyes). The ending couplet of the poem conveys a person who will live forever through this poem "So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, / So long lives this, and this gives life to thee." As mentioned before, it is important to read this sonnet not only because it depicts love so powerfully, but also because students can connect to love at this young age, they can relate to the words used by the speaker, and thus they can imagine projecting this through the feeling and writing of sonnets to describe these emotions.

Students will also read Shakespeare's *Sonnet 30* which deals with many concepts: ambition, love, death/loss, and hope. This sonnet sets a mood that students can identify with at the very beginning, "When to the sessions of sweet silent thought, I summon up remembrance of things past... my dear time's waste." Who doesn't think about the past sometimes as a wasted life with ambitions not fulfilled? The speaker then talks about "...precious friends hid in death's dateless night," referring to dead friends that he will never see again and whom he weeps for and will miss greatly. The third stanza describes his suffering at the losses that he has experienced "grieve at grievances forgone..which I new pay as if not paid before." The couplet, however, offers hope to the speaker. When he thinks of his "dear friend," the speaker feels that "all losses are restored and sorrows end." I am mainly using these sonnets to show the students that Shakespeare's ideas and themes transcend time- it is important for them to realize that Shakespeare was a man who truly understood life and people, that his sonnets deal with ordinary life and with the feelings of real, ordinary people.

Finally, students will read *Sonnet 55* using interpretative strategies that they will have learned by this time. I am mainly the facilitator of this reading. I am not going to give the students any answers; rather, I am going to lead them to the answers by empowering them to ask the important questions. Since *Sonnet 55* deals with the concept of immortality, which we will talk about and attempt to define. How can things or people be thought of as immortal? And how can people or things be immortalized? Students will then question what marble and what monuments Shakespeare has in mind. Where would the "gilded monuments of princes" be found? In the first stanza, the speaker talks about something that will transcend time: What is it? Students will note the "you" that is spoken about: "You shall shine more bright in these contents/ Than unswept stone besmeared with sluttish time." Why did Shakespeare use the phrase "sluttish time?" What is he saying about time? Having asked these questions, what is the speaker saying in the first stanza? In the second stanza, the speaker says "Nor Mars his sword nor war's quick fire shall burn/ The living record of your memory." How does this line connect with "time"? The third stanza states that "your praise shall still find room." Again, to whom does the speaker refer when he uses "your?" The couplet ends by saying "You live in this and dwell in lover's eyes." Is the "you" a person or something else? By answering these questions, students will develop higher thinking skills that will help them at any stage in life.

I will then introduce some Petrarchan sonnets so that students can note the difference between the two forms. We will read *Sonnet 140*, which I found in Patrick Cruttwell's book, *The English Sonnet*. This sonnet was translated into English by both Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, and Sir Thomas Wyatt (both known for their original and translated Petrarchan sonnets). Petrarch's sonnet talks about love, a love that is all consuming, as the speaker says "Love keeps his principal seat in my heart, / Comes like an armed warrior into my forehead, / There places himself and there sets up his banner." Students will always enjoy reading about a poem that talks about love. The speaker refers to a "she who teaches me to love and to suffer and who wishes that reason, modesty and reverence should restrain my great desire and burning hope." Students will address the "she" in this sonnet. Is "she" love, feelings, emotions or does "she" refer to an actual person and if so, how do we know this? This poem will allow me to give students a set of essential questions that will foster critical thinking. In addition, we will talk about the values emphasized in this sonnet. The speaker declares: "for he makes a fine end who dies loving well." Students will explore the meaning that is conveyed by questioning

themselves and digging deeper into the sonnet.

We will also read William Wordsworth's *Nuns Fret Not* which is another example of a Petrarchan sonnet. This sonnet is about the form or limitations of the sonnet but argues that the form is not as limiting as people think; in fact, the speaker concludes that although structure is supposed to limit these people— "nuns, hermits, maids, and students, yet it really helps them to overcome obstacles to work effectively, and such workers are actually very happy. The speaker in the poem must follow restrictions, i.e., he must write in the sonnet form; however, he is appreciative of this because he believes that there can be too much freedom for those "who have felt the weight of too much liberty," which in itself can be limiting. The speaker says that he has found "brief solace" in the limitations of the sonnet because its brevity has afforded him the ability to write effectively. This is a wonderful sonnet for students to read not only to examine the form of an Italian sonnet, but also to see what sonneteers themselves say about the sonnet and its form.

Students will learn that the Petrarchan sonnet, in contrast with many later Shakespearean sonnets, usually talks about unattainable love. As mentioned earlier, the fourteen lines of the Petrarchan sonnet are divided into two parts, the first eight lines (octave) and the ensuing six lines (sestet). This differs from the Shakespearean sonnet's quatrains- three units of four lines each ending with a couplet (two lines that rhyme). Students will learn that the octave's purpose is to introduce a problem, expressing a state of affairs or presenting a troubled situation. The problem is presented in the first quatrain and developed in the second. The beginning of the sestet is known as the volta or "turn" which introduces an emphasized change in tone or attitude in the sonnet. The sestet's purpose is to make a comment on the problem or find a solution. Note that Petrarch's sonnets almost never have a rhyming couplet.

I do not want to overload my students with too many traditional sonnets. Since they are mostly of Latino origin, however, they will enjoy reading a sonnet from the works of Pablo Neruda, a Chilean poet and politician. Neruda was born Neftali Ricardo Reyes Basoalto but changed his name because he admired the Czech poet, Jan Neruda. In 1971, Neruda won the Nobel Prize for Literature. Neruda wrote erotically charged love sonnets, including the famous "One Hundred Love Sonnets," inspired by his wife Mathilda Urretia.

We will study Neruda's *Sonnet XI* which deals with the concept of love. In the first quatrain, the speaker talks about an overwhelming love: "I crave your mouth, your voice, your hair." The speaker conveys that he is not nourished by "bread" and is disrupted by the dawn; he seeks something more powerful than nature. There is a natural flow of time that is conveyed by this sonnet; first, the speaker "craves," then in the second quatrain, the speaker "hungers" for the "sleek laugh" of his lover. Then, moving into the third quatrain, the speaker "wants" to "eat the fleeting shade" of his love's lashes. The last quatrain depicts a hunger that is unfulfilled by anything except his true love, a hunger that makes the speaker wait and "pace around hungry, sniffing the twilight, hunting for you/...like a puma in the barrens of quitratue." Neruda's writing in this sonnet masters the art of loving and wanting to have what is loved. The sonnet as a whole depicts a hunter (puma/Neruda) in search of his prey (human/wife of Neruda). When the prey is found, it will be devoured. Quitratue is a place in Chile, Neruda's birth place. This is a wonderful sonnet to read because the students can easily visualize a jungle cat pacing hungrily, its tail twitching, its nostrils flaring, waiting for food. It is necessary for students to have background information about the poet so that they can understand and relate to him. Connecting to the thoughts and emotions of a poet empowers students to connect to their own emotions and use their own voice.

We will also study Neruda's *Sonnet XVII*. The imagery in this sonnet is striking and the contrast between light and dark is effectively emphasized. Students will read this sonnet to study the effective use of imagery and

contrast. In the first quatrain, the speaker says "I do not love you as if you were salt-rose or topaz." this is an interesting line because salt-rose is a precious red rose and topaz is a precious stone. The speaker says that his beloved is more precious than both of these things. In the same quatrain, the speaker introduces "the shadow and the soul," the contrast of black and white. Moving through the sonnet, the second quatrain involves more talk of "plants" and the "light of hidden flowers," which contrasts with "lives darkly in my body." The contrast of light and dark is the guiding thread throughout the whole sonnet. One interpretation can be that the love itself is both "light" because it is good, is moral, is needed in life, but can also be "dark" because it can overwhelm and become obsessive. The third quatrain certainly insists that love is good, as the speaker states "I love you straightforwardly, without complexities or pride." However, the last quatrain can attest to the "dark" love; here, the speaker speaks of "where I do not exist, nor you." There is a sense here that the speaker is talking about a love that is beyond reason, beyond scope, and there is a depth to such a love that is disturbingly unclear.

As we are reading the sonnets, we will also break down and define vocabulary words such as couplet, quatrain, tercet, iambic pentameter, etc. Students will then write examples of couplets, quatrains, voltas, etc. Students learn to grasp concepts when they are presented in steps. They will then be assigned several sonnets which they will read individually and summarize to the class. Some of the sonnets will be read in groups, followed by group discussion and then a class discussion; the goal is for students to understand the sonnets on their own. Once students begin to understand the language (which is a difficult task for most), then they can begin to follow the arguments presented. This can only be done by practice, hence reading more sonnets is the key. As mentioned before, the final objective of this unit is for students to write their own sonnets both in Petrarchan and Shakespearean form. They will then present their sonnets to the class.

In order to put these objectives into practice, several educational strategies need to be put in place. The following strategies are going to be used to teach comprehension of the sonnet and other kinds of texts: analyzing, identifying, visualizing, clarifying, inferencing, paraphrasing, questioning the text, summarizing, kwl, think aloud, literature circles, Socratic Seminars and say something. Some of these may overlap, depending on the situation.

Analyzing; First, we will read a sonnet as a class (more than once if necessary). We will analyze the sonnet conceptually by breaking it down line by line; or we can read two lines, discuss, read two more lines, discuss again and so forth. The idea is to engage students and have them read between the lines and so empower them to answer some questions that I will pose. Students will be required to reread the lines in order to answer the questions, thus strengthening the ideas that they put forth.

Identifying: We will then identify the rhyme scheme. This can be done by asking students which words rhyme. Where are those words placed in the poem? Do they make the same sound? Do the next lines contain words that rhyme and if so do they have a similar sound? What letters are associated with each sound? How do the differing sounds impact the poem and what is being said?

Visualizing: all sonnets contain figurative language, such as metaphors and similes, many of which dealing with nature. These literary terms will be utilized to teach imagery. Shakespeare's sonnets very often compare thought and feeling with natural processes.

Clarifying the author's purpose: During a large class discussion, we will figure out the poet's intention or message to the audience, i.e., we will identify the main ideas expressed. Students will need a lot of scaffolding for this part of the exercise. I can do this by asking questions that are initially narrow but eventually become broader so that students can become focused on the important messages. I will enable students to answer the

questions by giving hints such as pointing them to the overall theme, and then breaking down the sonnet line by line or through phrases. In essence, I am working backwards to move the students forward. Students will be propelled to action by reading and rereading the assigned text and finding phrases, lines, and words that support their answers. They will learn the importance of textual evidence.

Inference: Kylene Beers defines inference as "the ability to connect what is in the text with what is in the mind to create an educated guess." ⁵ It is important for students to start making educated guesses. In life, not everything is going to be straightforward; sometimes one has to take a leap of faith and be confident in one's own decision. Students will utilize inference to learn about the intended audience of a poem. They will examine the question: "To whom is the author talking?" This again, can be answered by finding evidence—certain words or phrases that allude to the reader or words that convey information about the speaker. Students will question themselves about the speaker. Students will learn that they are usually the intended audience but sometimes the intended audience can be a specific individual, such as a lover or another poet. This can make a difference to the meaning of the poem.

Paraphrasing: We will then describe the situation or the problems presented and put those in our own words. In describing the situation, students have to figure out where the problem is expressed. By this time, they will know they can usually find it in the octave, which is the first eight lines of the sonnet. This will prevent time wasting because students can immediately look at those lines; it will also allow the students to grasp the concept of efficiency. It is amazing that the sonnet— a mere 14 lines— can say so much! This will help students understand the power of words; sometimes less is more. I can assess that students understood the poem when they can paraphrase succinctly what they have read.

Questioning the text: One of our goals is to find the turning point or the switch in tone of the sonnet so that we can find an answer or a solution to the problem. Again, the students will know at this point where to look for that emphasized change— the sestet. Traditionally, the turning point starts off with the volta in the Italian sonnet. This however can change and certain poets have tricked us by running together the octave and sestet and putting the change somewhere else! Students will become aware of this very quickly when they encounter such poems.

Summarizing: Another important goal is for students to be able to summarize the message of the poem. There is a huge difference between summarizing the message and paraphrasing what is read. Being able to summarize the message of the poem indicates that the students have thought critically about what was presented in the poem. In other words, students have grasped what the poem conveys and are responding to it.

KWL: KWL is a strategy requiring students to recall what they already know, what they want to know and what they have learned. Students will be assigned a chart with the three headings. Each day, as students read different poems, they will fill out this chart with new information. I ask that students date each time they write on the charts, and they are encouraged to use different color pens when they add new information. This will help them chart their progress and learning. KWL charts are essential for highlighting important background information, and also assist the students when they read individually.

Think Aloud: Think aloud strategies are used to build reading comprehension; they help students to think about possible interpretations. While students are reading, they may pause occasionally to think aloud about the connections that they are making, visual images that come to mind, problems that they are experiencing, and solutions for those problems. This is a metacognitive process that fosters independence in reading.

Literature circles: Students will choose their own reading from a variety of poems that I will assign. I will then divide the students into small temporary groups based on their choice of poems. Different groups will read different poems. The groups will meet on a regular basis to discuss their reading; students will be asked to write notes to guide both the readings and the discussions. One of the important aspects of literary circles is that the students pick their own discussion topics. The students are encouraged to make open and personal connections to the poems. In addition, everyone's thoughts, ideas, and questions are encouraged. Students must then rotate from group to group. It is important to note that the teacher is not part of any of the groups, but observes all the students. This is an especially fun strategy for students to share what they do know and to not be embarrassed about what they don't know. It also promotes a higher level of thinking and questioning.

Socratic Seminars: The Socratic Seminar is based on the theory that it is more productive to let students think for themselves than to give them the "right answer." For that purpose, students will read and study an assigned poem. After reading the poem, they will then face the challenge of open-ended questions. These questions are designed to allow students to think critically, analyze meaning, and express their views clearly and confidently. An important aspect of the Socratic Seminar is that students are asked to be respectful and attentive and not to interrupt each other. In addition, students are asked to paraphrase the previous speaker's ideas before agreeing or disagreeing. This strategy not only promotes the idea of socializing, it also enhances the students' listening and comprehension skills.

Say Something: The Say Something strategy is one that I especially enjoy using in class. Students are paired and assigned a poem to read together. Students know that the objective of this is to participate in the readings and the class discussion. Each pair must decide which partner is going to say something first. When students participate, they must focus on one of the following things: make a prediction, ask a question, clarify a misunderstanding, make a comment or make a connection. If they can't do one of those five things, students must reread the poem. I use this strategy to foster independence, critical thinking, social skills, and confidence. After we have read several poems together and used several strategies to foster comprehension, reading, writing, and higher level thinking, I will use activities that will reinforce these skills.

Classroom Activities

Classroom activity #1: *Scramble Poetry*. This activity will be used to test students' knowledge of the sonnet form. It will also be used to engage and enhance students' learning and development. The activity is as follows:

1. I will cut William Wordsworth's sonnet, *The World Is Too Much With Us* into fourteen line strips.
2. I will then divide the students into groups of four. Each group will receive an envelope explaining what is expected of them.
3. Students will follow instructions to put the sonnet back together correctly. Students are told only that they must reconstruct the poem, without any other directions.
4. I will walk around the room and talk to each group to assess their progress.

5. If students need help, I will suggest that they look at the rhyme scheme and iambic pentameter. Students will be advised to find the stressed and unstressed words. I may offer ideas such as looking up the meaning of certain words or phrases.

6. Students are allotted only 15 minutes to reconnect the poem. As soon as a group is finished, the activity is over.

7. We will then talk about the activity, determining how students came to the correct conclusion.

8. We will then discuss the poem, building on how students interpreted the poem and their questions or concerns. Students are always encouraged to pose their own question to the author. This activity involves a higher level of thinking and questioning in addition to teach students how to work with others effectively.

Classroom activity #2: Annotating. This is another teaching activity that I always rely on. It is highly effective because it strengthens students' reading comprehension and allows them to reconnect with literary terms and figurative language. Teaching students how to annotate a poem is not simple, but it is rewarding. This can be done very successfully with any sonnet or with other forms of poetry. The activity is as follows

1. I will write Shakespeare's Sonnet 129 on the board.

2. Students will read the poem aloud

3. I may ask a couple of students to read the poem so that all the students hear the differing ways the poem can be read.

4. I will then instruct students to identify and explain the following elements: rhyme scheme, figurative language, images, symbols, and sound devices (Students will already be familiar with this list; they will have been assigned it when we read our earlier poems).

5. Students will then be required to circle any part of the poem that stands out because it confuses them or is relevant to them.

6. They will also be asked to write questions in the margin, highlight unusual words or words that they don't understand, and mark phrases that indicate the poem's meaning.

7. Students will then determine the poem's theme and indicate the words and phrases that support their interpretation of the theme (textual support).

The objective of these exercises is to build the students' confidence. They should know that they have the ability to read and understand what is presented—part of which is the ability to read between the lines. They need to understand that they can "get it." These skills will help them in reading, writing, listening, critical thinking, questioning and remembering. The skills that students learn while reading poetry can be applied in other disciplines, and applied as well to the interpretive thinking that gets us all through life.

Classroom activity # 3: *a personal relationship with the author.* This is similar to the other activities mentioned but this activity is more personal because students will read a poem this time on their own. They have to connect with the poem in ways that they wouldn't when they read it in groups, and there will be no discussion until the questions are all answered, which means that students really have to read and reread. There are several steps: First, I assess the students' reading and comprehension levels. Based on this, I assign

them a relatively difficult poem to read. In this eighteen- minute activity, students will read the poem while listening to classical music, which I will play at the beginning of class. The idea of listening to classical music came to me when I was a student. Listening to music that does not have any words is soothing, relaxing and inspirational. My students rarely listen to classical music, so this is a chance to familiarize them with the benefits of listening to Beethoven, Bach, and Mozart. I have also noticed that classical music helps to soothe and focus the students while energizing them simultaneously. Students will read John Greenleaf Whittier's Forgiveness individually. The poem (title deleted) will be presented to them on a handout with the following instructions and assigned questions:

Read the poem slowly and carefully once and then reread. As you are reading, draw a picture depicting the images that you see on the assigned separate page.

- 1.What action does the speaker take by the end of the poem and why?
- 2.Define tone. What is the tone of the author in this poem?
- 3.What is the mood of the poem; what words set the mood?
- 4.What inferences can you make about the author of this poem and why?
- 5.What do you think is the title of this poem and why?
- 6.Write two sentences describing/paraphrasing what you have read.

Classroom activity #4: Students will write their own sonnets (individually): Shakespearean and Petrarchan. This is the final objective of the unit. It will test students' knowledge and development of their higher thinking skills.

Students are required to write an English sonnet in its basic form using all the components that make up a sonnet. Their sonnet can have any theme or number of themes. Students will also write a Petrarchan sonnet that must follow the basic Italian form. They then have to present both to the class in the form of an oral presentation. The rest of the class must use interpretative strategies to explicate both sonnets by referring to the specific components of sonnets. In order to accomplish this task successfully, I will conduct a class review of both types of sonnets. The class will be required to answer assigned questions that deal with both forms of sonnets. We will then have a class discussion/brainstorm so that we can gather some subject material for the writing of the sonnets. This exercise will be conducted in one class period. In the next class period, students will begin by writing the first 8 lines of the English sonnet. They will finish it for homework. They will then begin writing the Italian sonnet -the first and second quatrain. Again, they will finish it for homework. The next two periods will be spent on revising the two sonnets. I will divide the class into four groups and will meet with each person in the group reviewing and revising their sonnets. Students will make corrections as needed and prepare to present to the rest of the class. This activity is designed to be the culminating assessment of what the students have learned about the sonnet and about themselves as readers, writers, and thinkers in the modern world!

Notes

1. 1 Negri, Paul. *Great Sonnets*. Toronto: Dover, 1994. Print.
2. 2 Negri, Paul. *Great Sonnets*. Toronto: Dover, 1994. Print.
3. 3 Fuller, John . *The Oxford Book Of sonnets*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. Print.
4. 4 Fuller, John . *The Oxford Book Of sonnets*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. Print.
5. 5 Beers, Kylene. *When kids can't read: what teacher's can do..* S.I.: Bt Bound, 2003. Print.

Implementing District Standards: Meeting the Illinois Learning Standards.

This unit meets several standards that are set forth by the Illinois Learning Standards. Standards for high school stipulate that students must:

1. Read with understanding and fluency.
2. Read and understand literature representative of various societies, eras, and ideas.
3. Write to communicate for a variety of purposes
4. Listen and speak effectively in a variety of situations
5. Use the language arts to acquire, assess, and communicate information.

In this unit, I have used numerous strategies and activities which will ensure that students are reading with fluency and understanding literature that is representative of other genres. Students will also have several writing assignments including their sonnets and they will be asked to listen to and respond to questions, observations, comments, and participate in class discussion.

Websites for Teachers and Students:

"Petrarch." *Sonnet Central*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 July 2011. <http://www.sonnets.org/petrarch.htm>>.

Read Write Think <http://www.readwritethink.org/>

Reading List for Students:

Shakespeare Sonnets: 18, 29, 30, 55, 129.

Petrarchan Sonnets: 140

William Wordsworth: "Nuns Fret Not"

Pablo Neruda's Sonnets: XI, XVII

John Geenleaf Whittier: "Forgiveness"

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Blunden, Edmund, and Bernard Mellor. *Wayside Sonnets, 1750-1850*; . Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1971. Print.

Cruttwell, Maurice James Patrick. *The English Sonnet*,. [1st ed. London: published for the British Council and the National Book League by Longmans, 1966. Print.

A great source of information about the English sonnet.

Cruttwell, Patrick. *The Shakespearean Moment and its Place in the Poetry of the 17th Century*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1970. Print.

Feldman, Paula R., and Daniel Robinson. *A Century of Sonnets: The Romantic-Era Revival, 1750-1850*.. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. Print.

Fuller, John . *The Oxford Book of Sonnets*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. Print.

Fry, Paul. Yale National Initiative July Intensive Seminar, Love and Politics in the Sonnet. New Haven, July 2011. This Seminar Leader shared with us a wealth of knowledge.

Gibran, Halil. *The Treasured Writings of Khalil Gibran* . Secaucus, N.J.: Castle, 1985. Print.

Kallich, Martin , Jack Gray, and Robert Rodney. *A Book of The Sonnet*. New York: Twayne, 1973. Print.

Levin, Phillis. *The Penguin Book of The Sonnet: 500 years of A classic Tradition in English*. New York: Penguin Books, 2001. Print.

This was a great book for background information about poets. It also contained the poems that were used in this paper.

Mack, Nancy. *Teaching Grammar With Perfect Poems For Middle School*. New York: Scholastic, 2008. Print.

This was a good book for strategies to teach poetry.

Negri, Paul. *Great Sonnets*. Toronto: Dover, 1994. Print.

An excellent resource for the origins of the sonnet.

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