Teaching Tone, Mood and Purpose through the Interpretation of Activist Poetry

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Introduction

"A poet's work is to name the unnamable, to point at frauds, to take sides, start arguments, shape the world, and stop it from going to sleep." -Salman Rushdie

This quote, written by Salman Rushdie, sums up my belief surrounding the purpose of socially critical poetry. As an educator who grew up as an artist in the poverty stricken neighborhoods of Long Beach, California, listening to the calls to action by many of the underground punk rock groups of the late 1980's and early 1990's, I can easily relate to the notion that poetry, and other forms of literature, can be used as vehicles for self expression and social progress. I remember hearing Greg Graffin— front-man in the punk rock band Bad Religion, and frequent guest lecturer in the University of California system— singing lines such as "You are the government, you are jurisprudence, you are the volition, you are jurisdiction, and I make a difference, too (Religion 1988)" and feeling like I could someday change the world, or *a* world, just as music had changed mine.

By the time I finished High School I really began understanding the power of song, and by extension, poetry. I realized that poetry had the power to inspire thought, to evoke feeling and to and encourage action. Furthermore, music and poetry gave me a common platform with my colleagues and friends. This common platform became a strong foundation for social and political dialogue; many of my colleagues had similar— but often differing— views about the world in which we live. Nevertheless, there was always room to grow and ask questions about why society is constructed as it is, and just as importantly, why my own frame of reference is constructed the way it is.

This progression towards self-reflection eventually led to my own attempts at composition. I soon picked up a guitar and began my life-long ascent into songwriting. Initially I sang about superficial topics, but as I matured and exposed myself to authors and musicians with more substance, I soon found myself writing music with the intention of exposing conflict and increasing awareness around social issues.

It could be argued that my journey into teaching followed the same logic. As a child, I was enamored with the wealth of knowledge and the command of a classroom my teachers had. They were a symbol of authority, advocates who had the ability to present seemingly colorless information as rich and vibrant. Similarly to my

own relationship with music and poetry, they showed me how to use the English language as a tool to evoke emotion in my own writing.

Years later, as a 9 th and 10 th grade English and Social Studies teacher who continues to compose music and strives to broaden my own understanding of the world around me, I have learned to appreciate poetry as a means of self-expression. However, before students can appreciate poetry in this regard, they must first understand the significance of poetry as a mode of expression, the notion of activist poetry, and finally its utility.

Background on Activist Poetry

Poetry allows one to express ideas and experiences through rhythmic language in an artistic fashion, often relying on the experiences of the reader for its interpretation. Poetry offers a form of expression that is not confined to the linear process of exposition, but rather, has, at least at first glance, an allowed freedom of organization. Laurence Perrine, author of "The Nature of Proof in the Interpretation of Poetry," states, "Words in poetry [...] have richer meanings than in prose—they may exhibit purposeful ambiguities—but the meanings are still confined to a certain area. (Perrine 1962)" That is not to say that poetry does not require the logic and consistency of intention that a persuasive or expository essay has. Aside from form and function, poetry also taps into the essence of human existence: emotion and experience. T.S. Eliot, a famed author and critic, defines effective poetry as "not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality (Eliot 1921, 16)." Eliot's interpretation of poetry as a means to free oneself from the confines of one's own inner reality may conflict with other views of what poetry aims to accomplish, but it nonetheless illustrates the power of language over the psyche. This power is derived in part from literary devices and mechanisms such as hyperbole, imagery and alliteration, which are used more sparingly in exposition. It is through these literary devices that, combined with an author's intention, meaningful reactions are shaped.

The reactions stimulated by effective poetry are largely determined by the previous experiences of the reader and the framework in which that reader understands the world. Audre Lorde, an African American poet and writer, states that before the process of reading poetry begins, "We must first examine our feelings for questions, because all the rest has been programmed. We have been taught how to understand, and in terms that will insure not creativity, but the status quo. If we are looking for something which is new and something which is vital, we must look first into the chaos within ourselves (Hammond 1980, 20)." Lorde's claim that examining our own understandings and assertions, while paying special attention to the reason for which we believe the things we do, demonstrates how considering a reader's own background and experience is required if the reader wishes to find personal meaning within a poem. Similarly, June Jordan, an acclaimed poet and social activist, states that the primary function of poetry is to learn to tell your truth by examining what you know and how you feel. Lastly, Laurence Perrine states, "the poem is like an ink blot in a Rorschach personality test. There are no correct or incorrect readings: there are only readings which differ more or less widely from a statistical norm (Perrine 1962)." These three statements illustrate the importance of personal examination when attempting to arrive at a meaningful interpretation of a poem. And thus, through meaningful interpretation, effective poetry has the ability to encourage critical thinking, generate questions, change perception and evoke feeling or action. It is when this feeling or action is intentionally invoked that a poem, which is socially or politically critical in nature, can be considered "Activist Poetry."

Activist Poetry is a term that is used often by socially and politically conscious authors but falls short of having a concrete definition. For the sake of this unit, Activist Poetry will be defined as 'Poetry that brings attention to social or political injustices and aims to encourage action against these social or political injustices through traditional activist methods.' Hence, the essence of Activist Poetry is the hope to create meaningful, positive change in society through inspiration. Audre Lorde states, "Poetry is not only dream and vision; it is the skeleton architecture of our lives. It lays the foundations for a future of change, a bridge across our fears of what has never been before (Lorde 1984, 36)." Also noteworthy is Audre Lorde's paraphrasing of a statement made by June Jordan, which reads: "My function as a poet was to make revolution irresistible (Hammond 1980)." Lorde continues by commenting, "That is the function of us all, as creative artists, to make the truth, as we see it irresistible. That's what I want to do with all of my writing (Hammond 1980)." Activist poetry aims to encourage individuals to take control of their future. Its critique of the varying degrees of social and political injustice that take place in our world helps people of all backgrounds gain insight into circumstances that may have gone unnoticed beforehand. But if 'change through action' is the purpose of Activist Poetry, what makes it an effective vehicle for change, especially in discussion with high school students?

Activist Poetry is an effective vehicle for social and political change because it is an accessible foundation for artistic vision. Before any change is likely to occur, a problem must be identified, one that is perceived to be substantially effective. One way Activist Poetry is useful in that it allows poets to use artistic language to convey an idea in an artistic fashion, communicating a social or political problem in a manner that is attractive. During an Interview with MSNBC's Giacinta Pace, Erica Jong, a poet and activist, argues that poetry and activism essentially compliment one another. She states, "They are a good fit because poetry makes you aware of our human context (Pace 2010)." She continues by stating, "And the more you are made aware of your environment and the issues there, the more you can choose which issues you want to focus on (Pace 2010)."

Secondly, Social Activist poetry forces contemporary issues to the forefront of people's consciousness and, in effect, encourages discussion. June Jordan surmises in an interview with Julie Quiroz-Martinez from Colorlines.com, that "poetry becomes a means for useful dialogue between people who are not only unknown, but mute to each other. It produces a dialogue among people that guards all of us against manipulation by our so-called leaders (Quiroz-Martines 1998)." By prompting dialogue, activist poetry becomes an instrument for the early steps of social change, establishing and spreading a vision, or a solution to a perceived problem. Activist poetry allows the solution of a problem to be presented artistically, and therefore helps a social problem to be seen as less complex and more appealing, consequently compelling its readers to not only become advocates themselves but eventually activists in their own right.

However, encapsulating the beauty and intention of activist poetry, in a manner that sufficiently highlights a social problem in a way that is effective for urban high school students, is a difficult undertaking.

An effective way to teach students about the beauty and intention of activist poetry is through the examination of mood and tone. Mood is defined in poetry as the feelings or emotions that are evoked in the reader by the poem. Conversely, tone expresses the attitude the author has towards the subject or topic of the poem. Tone and mood, being similar in nature, are often mistaken for one another by high school students; both concern the *feelings* that are evoked through a poem— but one is held by the reader while the other is held by the author. Nevertheless, it is crucial to understand these two elements of poetry as they hold a close relationship with one another.

Understanding and teaching tone is central in poetry interpretation, especially when considering poetry as an

expression of social activism. In Laurence Perrine's Introduction to Poetry, *Sound and Sense*, Perrine states, "tone is the emotional coloring, or the emotional meaning, of the work, and is an extremely important part of the full meaning (Laurence Perrine 1991, 123)." He continues by adding, "We have not really understood a poem unless we have accurately sensed [...] its author's attitude (Laurence Perrine 1991, 123)." However, understanding the author's attitude is no easy task. How does a reader really determine how an author feels, without the author present? Perrine says, "The correct determination of tone in literature is a much more delicate matter than it is with spoken language, for we do not have the speaker's voice to guide us." Furthermore, "In text we do not have that luxury and thus, must recognize tone by other means." Perrine correctly asserts that as readers, we must develop a tool or approach in determining the tone of a poem if we are to effectively identify the author's intention. Understanding the author's intention is a vital step in the interpretation of a poem and is most effectively ascertained, aside from source material on the author, through the identification and consideration of a poem's tone.

This unit will attempt to give educators effective strategies, activities and methodology in teaching tone, mood and intention to high school students. This unit entails special consideration of low-skilled readers and writers and ELL students.

Rationale

As of 2013, I have taught at Emery Secondary School for two years as a 9 th and 10 th grade English and History Teacher. Emery Secondary School is made up of 218 students. Approximately 64% of the student population scored below proficient in ELA according to California STAR Test data (City-Data 2013). Furthermore, upon analysis of a faculty-based study of student test scores from 2011-2012, it was found that, behind writing, literary analysis would be the school's primary academic objective as it held the lowest degree of proficiency. These statistics shed light upon the lack of student proficiency in interpretation.

As of the 2010-2011 academic school year, the graduation rate for Emery Secondary School was 64% (Advisors 2013). The dropout rate for the same school year was 30% (Advisors 2013). The suspension rate at Emery Secondary School for the past four years has averaged 24.5%, meaning, on average, for every four students, there is one suspension (Advisors 2013). According to confidential student surveys that were given by the Emery Secondary School Wellness Department, approximately 70% of students reported being teased or targeted with prejudicial intent.

Lastly, there are many problems that students face at home that make obligations at school difficult. Students have reported a lack of trust between family members, household drug use, incarceration, and often, violence, abuse, hunger and neglect. This data offers a large degree of insight into the challenges and difficulties faced by teachers of the student population at Emery Secondary School.

Students living and learning in these types of environment often feel a sense of hopelessness, or a longing for the power to change the social and individual circumstances that hinder their ability to learn and find success. My goal with this project is to help students find relevance and establish a personal connection to a large variety of writers who have encouraged social change and action through poetry. It is often stated that students become stronger readers and more effective learners when they are engaged in material that has personal meaning. By examining the methods with which historically significant poets have influenced history,

students will not only learn to more effectively interpret poems but also find personal meaning and relevance within these poems.

Teaching students about tone, mood and purpose will encourage students to analyze poetry in a more meaningful way; instead of students examining simply *what* is being said, students will be encouraged to analyze *how* and *why* it is being said. This natural progression of questioning will help students develop a more sophisticated perspective on textual analysis and thus improve their Literary Analysis scores. The curriculum unit below is geared towards less proficient 9 th grade students who struggle with literary analysis and poetry interpretation.

Curriculum Objectives

Content Objectives Regarding Unit Texts

What Whitman "I Hear America Singing"

Although this poem may not be considered activist poetry in the sense of containing a highly critical social or political message, it does, however, demonstrate a degree of consciousness surrounding the social order in America. It is this reason, coupled with its detailed imagery, which makes it a great starting point for struggling learners who are first being introduced to socially conscious poetry.

"I Hear America Singing" is a poem that aims to celebrate a vision of America that embodies tolerance, hard work and opportunity. Students should first be able to identify the poem's lower-order thinking elements. Students will come to understand that the persons in the poem are American workers of varied backgrounds and industries, singing an array of proud songs in celebration of their lives. Students will be able to identify the different types of workers and find significance in their variety. Furthermore, students will be able to consider the imagery Whitman uses to help understand the poem's purpose and its author's tone.

The clear vocabulary of this poem will help students identify Whitman's purpose. Words like 'singing,' 'strong,' 'varied,' 'carols,' 'belongs,' and 'melodious' help paint a picture of happiness, ownership and prosperity— thus allowing students to make clear distinctions surrounding Whitman's tone, or personal feelings, about the American worker.

Students should also understand the significance of this poem as a depiction of a country that stands up for opportunity, the working man (and woman), and his right to own what he works for. Some students may decide that Whitman's poem is about socialism: working class men and woman working for the betterment of the nation. However, Whitman's use of the words, 'Varied,' 'Belong,' and 'No one else' suggest private ownership and specialization. Nevertheless, this song illustrates a country that is filled with average men and women who make their country stronger by being responsible, hard-working individuals. It is the variety in the songs they sing that makes America such a harmonious place to live in Whitman's view.

Lastly, students should begin reflecting on their own feelings that have been evoked after thoroughly reading the poem. Students will be introduced to the concept of Mood and how poetry, when considered through the framework of one's own experiences, can stir many different but powerful emotions within a reader. Students may experience this poem as one that encourages pride, community, joyfulness, tolerance, etc. Conversely,

students may argue that this poem is unrepresentative of the working man's experience. Either way, students will be encouraged to examine their own reactions to the poem and, most importantly, be able to identify what parts of the poem are responsible for those reactions.

As a final objective, students will create a number of questions that deal with the poem's topic, its depiction of that topic, or the author's intentions. The process of creating questions after reading Whitman's poem will help prepare them for poetry that is less accessible and contains more challenging topics.

Chief Dan George "There is a Longing"

Unlike Whitman's "I Hear America Signing," George's poem, "There is a Longing" highlights a divide between two cultures and the precariousness of Native American's future heritage. However, both poems challenge students to think about the relationships between peoples, both within and between societies. Students should understand the topic of this poem as follows: The speaker of the poem, presumably Chief Dan George, talks about a deep longing to solidify a prosperous future for Native Americans despite contentious and unresolved conflict with the White Man. He stresses the importance of having each generation stronger than the last and emphasizes this need by expressing his own feelings of impotence as a leader. George is convinced that if the heritage of Native Americans is to be protected, cooperation with the White Man is a necessity. However, the real struggle may be convincing the Native Americans to cooperate with the White Man. If students are having a difficult time understanding the topic of this poem in spite of using reading strategies such as 5W and Sum-it-Up, use the following line of questioning to help initiate lower-order thinking: what does the speaker long for? What is the speaker's greatest fear? What does the speaker want to happen? What is the problem the speaker faces? What is the speaker's solution to the problem?

Next, students will identify the purpose of the poem as a warning to the generations of Native Americans following Chief Dan George. Students may find purpose in the poem easier to identify when examining its literary devices. George's extensive use of metaphor and hyperbole help communicate a sense of urgency and magnitude: "There is a longing in the heart of my people to reach out and grasp that which is needed for our survival." Furthermore, George says, "The long years of study will demand more determination […] endurance. But they will emerge […] to grasp the place in society that is rightly ours." George's purpose is not only to instill fear or a sense of fragility in his people, but also to offer propositions to alleviate the fading Native American heritage. George states, "I shall grab the instruments of the white man's success—his education, his skills. With these new tools I shall build my race into the proudest segment of your society." Students should understand that the purpose of this poem is not to simply illustrate the divide between two cultures. When considering the last line of the poem, "ruling and being ruled by the knowledge and freedoms of *our* great land," George clearly wishes to peacefully coexist in a country that is not plagued by a fading heritage, but rather prospering in the collective harmony between two peoples who have learned to embrace their own history as well as the future histories of their "great land."

George's heavy use of literary devices and colorful vocabulary will also aid students in determining the tone of the poem. As stated above, George does not hold the White Man in contempt, necessarily, but rather acknowledges the White Man's place in society and thus hopes to benefit from their technology and education systems. However, that is not to say George is not discouraged. Students should focus on lines 16-19 where George speaks about his loss of power and inability to make war in the traditional sense. George acknowledges the new weapons of his people are his tongue and speech, implying that he is only as powerful as his audience will allow him to be. Using some of the reading strategies in this unit that focus on vocabulary, students will find George's tone as variably frustrated, discouraged, hopeful, ambitious, utilitarian and proud.

Helping students find the tone and purpose of this poem will help them form their own conclusions about this topic. Students of all backgrounds may relate to this poem as it can be interpreted in the context of a minority group being displaced, or simply the unraveling of one generation to the next. Have students record their own reactions to the poem and make meaningful connections to the topic of cultural disconnect. If students are having difficulty identifying their mood in response to the poem, ask them a series of questions: Have you ever felt a disconnect between your family or friends? When in History (or other literature) have we seen two cultures clash with one another? Do you believe the Chief's plan to work with the White Man is a good idea? Why or why not? These questions force students to consider the themes of the poem in the context of their own lives.

Bono and the Edge "Pride (In the Name of Love)"

U2's contemporary hit, "Pride" is a song that celebrates Dr. King's message of love, tolerance and peaceful resistance. Similar to the objectives concerning other texts from this unit, the objectives for this song focus on students considering why Bono wrote this song and how Bono feels about King as an activist.

Students will first examine the subject of this song. Bono writes about "one man" who has made a meaningful impact during his lifetime by sacrificing himself in the name of love. Students may draw an immediate connection to Jesus, or other spiritual leaders who have struggled to increase peace and love on earth, often at the expense of their own lives. Initially, students should not be told this song was written as a celebration to Dr. King's life work. Instead, students should first gain comprehension concerning the events in this poem. That is to say, "one man" was persecuted for his strict belief in love and tolerance. Students should be made aware that the figure in the song experienced great hardship through his resistance, and furthermore, was killed for his efforts. However, this man's discipline and zeal was clearly evident even after his death. His pride could not be taken from him despite having his life taken. Once students have gained an understanding of the events of the song, and the significance of the "one man," students can now begin to formulate ideas about who U2 is referring to. If students are having a difficult time identifying the "one man," attention can be directed towards the date of April 4 th . On April 4 th 1964, Martin Luther King was assassinated under the "Memphis Sky."

Naturally, the next objective is to have students consider the intention of the author in writing this text. Furthermore, what is the author saying about or feeling towards this "one man" and the "Pride" that could not be stolen? Looking at the repeating chorus may give students a direction towards identifying the purpose of this song. Bono sings, "In the name of Love, What more in the name of love?" Bono is most likely arguing that Dr. King made the ultimate sacrifice by giving his life while trying to create positive change in society, founded upon the cornerstone of Dr. King's teachings: love. Secondly, Bono's line, "Shots ring out in the Memphis sky, Free at last," implies sympathy towards King as he experienced intolerance and persecution. Bono feels that although King was taken from this world, his spirit is no longer bound to the hardships he experienced while he was alive. In a way, this departure from the earthly plane was the only way King could experience true freedom from persecution. Students should conclude that Bono's purpose in writing this song was to celebrate the life of Dr. King by honoring his struggle and acknowledging his unbreakable pride.

Students will also analyze the vocabulary of this song to better understand the tone. Bono's repeated use of "One man" to refer to King acts as a constant reminder that one individual was responsible for such contention and ultimately, a significant shift in race relations in the United States. Furthermore, Bono draws a clear divide between the "one man" and his persecutors by referring to them as "they" towards the end of the song. This distinction further demonstrates the challenge King faced as one man fighting against many. Bono uses

metaphor to illustrate how King was, in effect, caught in a movement of social unrest but still had the strength to resist his oppressors. Bono sings, "One man caught on a barbed wire fence, One man he resist." Bono admires King for maintaining his strength and courage while in turmoil. Lastly, the title and subject of the song, pride, shed light upon one of many possible qualities Dr. King had that resonated with Bono. Bono clearly has a deep admiration for Dr. King and respects the sacrifices King made to ensure society was made aware of the injustices against people of color living in the United States.

More so than others, this text will evoke emotion within students. My objective is that students will learn to examine the mood of this poem by considering their own emotional responses. Using an activity or reading strategy in this unit, students will take inventory of their own reactions both during and after reading this text. Students will make distinctions about which parts of the text evoked a particular emotion within themselves.

Who Understands Me But Me by Jimmy Santiago Baca

Jimmy Santiago's poem, "Who Understands Me But Me" is one that many students can relate to, and thus, will be the more encouraged to practice their developing poetry interpretation skills. Broadly speaking, this poem is about how experiencing hardship in life can lead to personal discovery and appreciation. The content objectives for this poem center on students understanding the intention of the author, identifying the poem's tone and mood, and lastly, establishing the poem's significance in the framework of social activism.

Students should first acquire a general understanding of the events in the poem. It is broken into two stanzas, each expressing different feelings. The first stanza is structured, uniform and rhythmic. The first stanza tells the audience about things that have been taken away from the speaker. It is full of oppression and seizure. Here, Santiago starts every sentence with "they" to help highlight the difference between the speaker and those in the poem that have alienated the speaker from a variety of different commodities. The first stanza depicts a prisoner in a cell who has had his rights, necessities and feelings of hope taken away. The speaker eventually ends a line, however, with, "who understands me when I say this is beautiful? … I have found other freedoms." It is through this last line that the audience is freed from the rigid structure cataloguing oppressions in the first stanza.

The second stanza, by comparison, visually looks free and is clearly not obliged to follow the structured rhythm that makes up the first stanza. Unlike the first, the second stanza begins with topics that are framed in the positive. For example, the speaker says, "I can live with myself, and I am amazed at myself, my love, my beauty." Here the speaker talks about the beauty of self-discovery and looking inward. He states, "I have found parts of myself never dreamed of by me, they were goaded out from under rocks in my heart." Students should see a clear distinction between these two stanzas- both structurally and thematically.

Students will analyze the vocabulary and literary devices in the poem to help establish a sense of tone and purpose. Going back to the first stanza, the speaker of the poem clearly has contempt for those that are persecuting him. By repeatedly starting each line with "they," Santiago puts "them" in the spotlight, forcing us to think about who these people are and, just as importantly, why these people are depriving our speaker of his most common rights. However, Santiago still wants to make this poem about the speaker, as he routinely comes back to "I" and emphasizes the effect 'their' oppressions have had on the speaker. Thus, we can gather that Santiago may not be writing this poem solely to condemn an oppressive force, but rather to help us examine the consequences of this type of treatment. Furthermore, we are not given any context behind this scene and therefore cannot effectively arrive at any conclusion regarding possible crimes or misdemeanors of the speaker. We can only examine the transformation that speaker undergoes. Students will be able to more effectively identify the tone of purpose of the poem by interpreting the second stanza. The speaker's ability to

not only live without his commodities, but actually thrive, will help students understand Santiago's purpose. This poem was most likely written to encourage people to not get discouraged when being faced with insurmountable odds and to be aware that often times, facing challenges can help you become a stronger, more aware individual.

Once students have become comfortable interpreting Santiago's poem, they will formulate the significance of the poem while paying special attention to whether or not this poem should be considered activist in nature. Unlike most activist poetry, this poem does not demand or encourage political/social action. Rather it uses an oppressive event to shed light upon the liberating effects of solitude. Students will have to determine what Santiago is saying about the oppressors in the poem, if anything at all. To encourage students to meet this objective, ask them: How do you think Santiago views "them" in the poem? How do we know? Do you think Santiago is condoning solitary confinement? Do you think Santiago sees positive aspects in having been imprisoned? These questions will help students develop their own opinions on the author's intention as well as assigning meaning to the poem.

Objectives in Student Ability

My overall objective for my students is to strengthen their interpretation skills and improve their reading proficiency and comprehension. My approach to tackling this objective is twofold: primarily, use a variety of reading strategies to expand my students' academic abilities and secondly, expanding student understanding and awareness of social, political and personal issues by exposing them to content that is relevant, empowering and personally meaningful.

For this curriculum plan I have divided my student ability objectives into two categories: student ability and student empowerment. Curriculum objectives surrounding student ability will center on skills that students will be taught either directly (for example, reading strategies) or indirectly (for example, independent practice making inferences through reading). Alternatively, curriculum objectives centered on student empowerment will focus more on students' developing meaningful connections and finding personal relevance while examining the content of this unit.

In terms of student ability, this unit is designed to teach students how to identify tone, mood and an author's purpose in poetry. That is to say, students will be able to use context clues and identify key words and phrases that were designed to convey the relationship between the author of the poem and the subject that the author addresses. Students will be able to articulate the significance of the vocabulary and phrasing the author employs.

Before students can effectively interpret an author's work, they must first complete all the necessary low-order thinking steps. Students will learn to identify superficial information in a text by using a commonly used reading strategy, which I have named 5W. 5W is an abbreviation for Who, What, When, Where, and Why. 'How' is intentionally omitted as 'How' will be addressed through a variety of different reading strategies that will be used once the basic information from the text is digested. My intention is that students will use the 5W reading strategy to record general information that can be gathered from a poem (as well as context and background about the text) using a graphic organizer. By learning how to identify, organize and record the "who, what, when, where, and why" of a text, students will be more equipped to develop sound interpretations surrounding the text, such as identifying the author's purpose and pinpointing the tone of the text. Students will use the 5W strategy for all future texts, thus creating a standardized initial approach to diving into text.

Students will learn how to summarize what an author is saying by using the post-reading strategy, Sum-it-Up.

Sum-it-Up will be the first step in determining purpose as it will help students locate and record the main points, commands, and opinions of a text. By coupling the 5W and Sum-it-Up reading strategies, students will develop a strong, accessible way of identifying and organizing information, thus creating a strong foundational understanding that will act as a spring board into higher-level questioning.

Students will also learn how to make inferences about text, and consequently, begin to use words, phrases and excerpts as evidence in developing their own interpretation of text. Students will learn to locate sections of text that hint at the author's purpose and tone by using a graphic organizer entitled "Making Inferences." Initially, I will give students compelling phrases I have chosen from the text and have students infer what the phrase lends to the author, the author's purpose, and the author's tone. However, my aim is that students will learn to make inferences on their own through close examination of text. By teaching students to identify compelling components of text and, in turn, ask them to interpret said text's significance and meaning, students will be more equipped to, eventually, clearly identify the author's purpose for writing, and interpret the tone of a text.

Through the process of Making Inferences, in conjunction with additional activities and strategies, students will learn how to use text as evidence to defend their interpretations. With Common Core standards being implemented at my high school, teaching students to use text as evidence (not simply as a catalyst for making a meaningful personal connection with a topic or subject) is a primary objective. Towards the end of the unit, students will have the ability to arrive at their own interpretation, but more importantly, demonstrate how and why the text led the student to his/her conclusion by using said text as evidence.

Finally, as stated above, my primary objective is for students to interpret the tone, mood and purpose of a text. Students will know how to comprehend and articulate an author's purpose for writing by examining the context of the text, the vocabulary and phrases included in the text and making inferences using said vocabulary and phrases. Furthermore, students will demonstrate the ability to cite passages in the text as evidence to support their own interpretation of the author's purpose as well as the overall significance of the piece. Secondly, students will know how to establish a clear understanding of tone and mood within the text. Students will cite evidence to support their own interpretation of the author's attitude towards the subject of his or her text.

If we help students establish a framework for examining text that begins with lower-order strategies like 5W and Sum-it-Up, students can develop an effective approach to interpretation. Helping my students work gradually towards thinking critically about text, such as identifying purpose, tone and mood, will enable me as a teacher to improve students' reading proficiency, content comprehension and interpretation skills by avoiding the pitfalls in other methods of teaching lower performing students how to read and think critically about text.

Aside from my objectives centered on improving my students' *ability* in reading and interpretation, I also aim to increase my students' awareness surrounding the topics within the texts in a broad sense as well as help students to make meaningful connections to the texts we will be examining.

Objectives in Student Empowerment

Students in my High School often express a sense of hopelessness and powerlessness. While this curriculum unit is primarily about teaching students skills in interpretation, it is just as much about empowering students by encouraging them to be passionate, proactive and socially aware.

During this unit I hope students will find personal significance in some of the text. Students will be exposed to a variety of historical figures that range in age, race, gender, etc. Many, but not all, of these authors are figures who have expressed social and political criticisms in their times, often times leading to positive social change. I hope students will find a way to identify with some of these figures in their historical setting and thus "buy in" to the more academic components of this unit.

Furthermore, my wish is that students will find the text relevant to their own history or interests. Although many of the texts in this unit deal with broad social problems that America was faced with at a particular time in her history, almost all of the themes of these texts can be applied to the "daily grind" students are faced with in the hallways at school. For example, finding the courage to overcome self-consciousness, racism, stereotypes and gender roles, can be very difficult for a high school student. For a student to see that said historical figures have navigated through the darkest tunnels of oppression may give my students the hope, confidence and drive to circumvent some of their own sources of oppression.

Lastly, I want my students to become inspired and, in consequence, proactive in expressing, and/or combating oppression that they are faced with in their lives. Through this unit, I hope students will learn that change does not happen on its own; change is only initiated through action. As will be elaborated in my section on assessment, students will create their own piece of poetry or a speech that centers on a social, political or cultural problem that the student perceives. My objective is that students will take this opportunity seriously and recognize their assignments as a chance to express their dissatisfaction to some form of oppression that they are faced with on a daily basis. If the implementation of this unit is successful, students will learn that being a social activist or social advocate does not necessarily mean they are obliged to openly protest oppression on a daily basis, but rather that contributing to making this world a better place can take many forms, often peaceful but always rooted in expression.

Reading Strategies

Below, I will elaborate on how each reading strategy is used to help students effectively interpret the texts in this unit. As will be noted, some of the strategies are implemented before or after reading, while others are implemented while reading. Each reading strategy will be used for each text in this unit with the aim of helping students create a regular approach to interpreting historical text. Lastly, the order of these strategies is deliberate. For maximizing the effectiveness of these tools it is suggested that they be used successively (over the course of the entire unit, not within the scope of each text); each strategy builds upon the one before it, and scaffolds the process of interpretation and critical thinking.

"My Reaction"- My Reaction is a post-reading strategy that is designed to help students record their initial reactions to a text and thus become conscious of the feelings that were evoked while reading the text. My Reaction is a two step process. Initially students will record five reactions (more specifically, feelings, thoughts, ideas, connections, and images that pop into their head while they read the text) within a circle that is in the center of the paper. The circle is divided into five slices, with each slice being the designated space for a single reaction. After students have recorded five initial reactions, students will then re-read the text to try and identify what word, phrase or passage, specifically, evoked those reactions. Once students identify these excerpts, they will then record the excerpts on the boxes that correlate with the slice that now should contain the student's initial reaction to the piece. This reading strategy is relevant because it helps us

understand how text can promote social or political action through literary devices. Students can share their reactions with each other in groups, or partners. It is suggested that the teacher call on a handful of students to share their reactions while the teacher is recording these reactions on the board. After the initial reactions are recorded as a class, the class can discuss why these reactions were experienced. Probably there will be common reactions and common excerpts among the students. This practice is effective because it illustrates on a smaller level how text can evoke powerful feelings on a collective level.

"5W"- The 5W strategy is a during-reading strategy that is designed to help students comprehend the lower-order thinking aspects of a text by organizing the contents into different categories. 5W is an abbreviation for Who, What, Where, When and Why. As mentioned above, 'How' is intentionally omitted (but can be included at the discretion of the teacher), as it usually leads to a higher order thinking process that is best addressed after the superficial aspects of a text have been digested. For this reading strategy, students are given a graphic organizer that contains five columns or boxes. Each box represents one of the W's. The 5W approach can be implemented in a variety of ways.

The first way 5W can be implemented is by having students record information in the text into the appropriate category of 5W. This can be done individually or with a partner. For example, while reading the lyrics to U2's song, "Pride," students may fill the 'What' box with: barbed wire, a shooting, betrayal, kiss, love. Furthermore, the 'Where' box may contain: Empty beach, Memphis. This approach is effective in helping students identify and organize the factual contents of a text.—to take inventory.

Another way the 5W method can be implemented is by asking students to write three questions in each box about matters that seem unresolved after they've read the text. This is an effective way to help students generate a variety of multi-tiered questions. Continuing our examination of "Pride," questions that may arise in the 'Why' box may be: Why was the man shot? Why can Pride not be taken? Why was the man betrayed with a kiss? Whereas the 'Who' box may contain: Who is the narrator talking about? Who was oppressing the man in the story? The questions generated by students after reading a text can be a great way to lead them into a student-centered discussion.

"Sum-it-Up"- Sum-it-Up is an after-reading strategy that aims to help students use phrases or passages from a text to create a short, concise summary of what the author is saying. It is generally more effective to initially supply students with potent passages from the text for them to summarize, before giving students the autonomy to summarize passages of text on their own. When looking at the graphic organizer, Sum-it-Up is made up of three identical columns: A, B and C. Each column contains a blank box titled "passage", a smaller box titled "keywords," and a third box titled "summary." On the bottom of the page, independent from column A, B and C is a box labeled "Summed-Up!" This box is where the students will write their final summary after the process, which is explained in detail below, is complete.

For this reading strategy, ask students to get into pairs. This reading strategy is best done in pairs as students can reach more effective summaries after negotiating each other's ideas. For this example, I will assign a poem entitled "There is a Longing" by Chief Dan George. After students have read the poem in its entirety (and presumably, completed previous reading strategies), pass out passages from the text that you have printed and cut into small squares that will fit into the box titled "passage." Students can paste these print outs onto their graphic organizer to avoid copying down long passages. Have students analyze the passage that you have provided for them. Remind them only to consider the passage in question and try not to consider passages in the text that are not directly part of the passage currently being examined. Asking students to choose three keywords (or more, depending on the length of the passage) from the passage that

are "telling" or "required to understand" what is being said. After a brief discussion with their partners, have students write down these keywords in the box titled "Keywords." Next, ask students to write one sentence that includes all three keywords, summarizing what is being said in the passage. Remind them not to worry too much about being specific, but rather, tapping into the big idea. This sentence is to be written in the box titled summary. This sentence will be titled sentence A.

Repeat the same process for columns B and C, creating sentence B and C, respectively. To finalize this strategy, have students combine sentence A, B and C into a 3-sentence paragraph that will be written in the lower box titled "Summed-Up!"

This strategy is helpful for students who have a difficult time knowing what passages are significant when trying to summarize or interpret text. Giving students a print-out of important passages both helps alleviate students feeling overwhelmed by a long text and helps students feel that part of the work is already done. Again, this reading strategy is designed to help students extrapolate the general theme or idea that an author is trying to convey, which is essential in interpreting the tone and purpose of a piece of work.

"Making Inferences"- Making inferences is an after reading strategy that can be effectively coupled with the "Sum-it-Up" strategy. Making Inferences is designed to encourage students to begin thinking critically about a text and is most effective after students have established a clear understanding of the lower-order thinking aspects of a text. Making Inferences helps students begin thinking about the purpose of a text, that is to say, begin considering the author's intention. Using this strategy is also effective in having students begin to see passages as evidence towards their own conclusions about the text. Lastly, this strategy encourages students to begin considering the relationship between the text, its author and any relevant background or context.

Making Inferences is a three-step process. This graphic organizer is made up of three horizontal rows. Each row contains three boxes and each row is independent of the others, thus allowing three inferences to be developed per graphic organizer. The boxes are labeled box 1 "What the Author Said," box 2 "What I Know," and, box 3 "What I can Infer." Students will examine a passage or phrase from the text that will be written in the "What the Author Said" box. Secondly, students will fill the second box, "What I Know" with either a personal experience that relates to the topic of box 1 or background/context about the author, social climate, period in history, etc. Teachers who wish to adhere to the Common Core standards may want to avoid asking students to write about their own experiences in the box titled "What I Know," and instead, ask students to list specific information about the author and/or the social/political climate surrounding the author at the time. This suggestion concentrates more on using concrete evidence to help students make inferences. Lastly, students will essentially combine the two boxes with the goal of arriving at a conclusion about what can be inferred about the intention of the text or the author's purpose in writing. This conclusion will be written in the box labeled "What I can Infer."

For the following example of how this reading strategy can be applied in the classroom, I will use Walt Whitman's poem, "I Hear America Singing."

Box 1 may contain: Each singing what belongs to him or her and to no one else, the day what belongs to the day-at night the party of young fellows, robust, friendly, singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

Box 2 may contain: Walt Whitman often celebrated democracy, friendship and American values.

Box 3 may contain: Walt Whitman wrote this poem to celebrate the working people of America, encourage

people working in harmony, being friendly with one another despite their differences. He hoped to express the strength in the American worker and possibly, the story of America.

Classroom Activities

Classroom activities for this unit will primarily be focused on a) helping students identify and consider the tone of a text, b) helping students identify and establish the author's purpose in writing, c) prompting students to consider and discuss the effectiveness, significance and meaning of text, and d) encouraging students to express their own feelings and convictions about topics in the texts used in this unit.

Before Reading Activities

The following three activities are designed to be done successively as they all require the same premise. Before giving students the poem in its entirety, teachers should break down the poem into an alphabetical list of all of its vocabulary words, thus eliminating any degree of cohesion and possibility for comprehension. Words like "the" or "have" and conjunctions should be omitted. Using adjectives, nouns, and adverbs should be the primary focus. These words will then be typed onto a handout that can be passed out to the students. Because we want to encourage students to arrive at independent conclusions, the poem's title and author's name should be omitted from the handout.

5 Words – 5 words is an activity that students can do individually or with a partner. It is designed to help students gain an understanding of the tone and mood of a text by choosing and interpreting vocabulary from a text that gives insight into the author's intention. As mentioned above, the premise of this activity requires a poem to be broken down into an alphabetical list of its vocabulary words, and printed onto a handout that can be passed out to each student.

To execute this activity, give students the handout that contains the list of vocabulary from the deconstructed poem. Give students 2 minutes (or longer, depending on the size of the poem) to silently read all of the vocabulary words on the handout. Next, ask students to choose five words from the handout that they feel are most powerful, significant or meaningful. Even more importantly, you may ask students to choose five words that best hint at what the poem is about. Inform students that they will be asked to share their five words. Give students 60 seconds to perform this section of the activity.

When students are finished, ask them to share the words they chose. Record the words students chose on a large piece of butcher paper. This will help illustrate patterns and commonality between the students, as many words will appear repeatedly. Pose questions to the students about the nature of vocabulary used in this poem. What type of words are these? What kinds of imagery do we see when thinking about these words? What are the denotative and connotative meanings of these words? What do you think this poem is about? What is the subject of the poem? How does the author feel about the subject of the poem?

After students have finished sharing, and a completed list of words has been created near the front of the class, underline the top 5 words that were chosen most often by the students. This new set of 5 words can be used as a springboard for a discussion about subject of the poem, the author's feelings towards the subject of the poem, and the intention of the poem.

Gimme Some Value – It is suggested, but not required, that this activity be implemented right after the above mentioned activity, "5 Words." This activity is designed to help students identify and examine the denotative and connotative meaning of rich vocabulary within a text. Students will be assigning value to each word in the poem, under the headings positive, neutral or negative. The primary goal of this activity is to help students determine the author's purpose, but even more so, the poem's tone.

Similarly to the "5 Words" activity, "Gimme Some Value" requires students to have an alphabetized list of a poem's vocabulary. It is ok for students to use the same handout from "5 Words" despite its presumed annotation.

For this activity, students can work independently or in pairs. Ask students to examine the vocabulary from the text and consider the conclusions that arose from the previous activity. Inform students that they will be assigning a value to each word: positive, negative or neutral. Students can annotate each word by writing the following symbols above each word: (+) positive (-) negative and (o) neutral. Remind them that there is no right or wrong answer, and it is not only likely, but encouraged, that different students will assign different values to different words. Model this exercise with your students using two or three vocabulary words from the text. Give students approximately three minutes to complete this exercise.

Once students have completed this exercise, use a copy of the handout on an overhead projector or smart board to supplement the next section of the activity. As a class, go down the list of words on the handout, asking students to raise their hands for each word they annotated as positive. Repeat this process for vocabulary words that were marked negative. Pose a line of questions to the class that aims to encourage a discussion about the tone of the poem: What kinds of words are used in this poem? What trends do we see about the types of words used? Are the words good or bad, or neither? Why do you think the author chose to use such _____ type of words? What do these words say about the subject of the poem? What do these words tell us about the author's feelings towards the subject of the poem?

Presumably, many of the words will be met with mixed reactions. After inventory has been taken for each word, choose 3-5 words that students disagreed over. To encourage students to think critically about their own experiences surrounding the subject of the text, ask students to talk with a partner about a word they disagreed on. Frame their discussion with the following statements: "I felt this word had a positive/negative/neutral connotation because I…"

This activity helps students to begin thinking critically about how the author of a poem deliberately chooses vocabulary with the intention of evoking an emotional response. By doing this activity students can have a class centered discussion surrounding the author's tone and the mood that is evoked from simply analyzing the vocabulary in the poem.

After Reading Activities

Word Groups- Word Groups is an after reading activity that will help students a) identify the topic, theme, or subject of a poem and b) identify the mood of a poem. Word Groups is most effective in groups of three and in its later stages, as a class. This activity uses the graphic organizer plainly titled "Word Groups" to solicit students to categorize the vocabulary of a poem into groups based on thematic similarities. The threshold for

which words are either put or not put into a category is totally determined by the student(s) and should not be concretely defined. For example, students may choose to put the words 'Gun,' 'Violence,' and 'Death' into the same category despite these words meaning very different things. One should not put too much energy into ensuring that the words are categorized appropriately, being sure mainly that that students are making the connections between the words used in a text and their own views and feelings surrounding the theme of a chosen category.

To execute this activity, have students get into groups of two or three. After having read the poem and passing out the activity sheet, ask students to begin underlining words in the poem that they believe are significant in communicating the poem's message and meaning. Encourage students to underline as many words as they can, not limiting them to only adjectives and adverbs. After students have underlined their words, ask students to start classifying these words into different groups. Usually three different groups is sufficient. Students will eventually assign the name or category of each group once the group has been given a{?} character. If students are having a difficult time starting, tell them to find three words they have underlined that are all different from one another. These three words will then go into three different boxes, respectively. Students will gain momentum once they begin categorizing. Encourage students to negotiate with their group as to which words deserve to go in which boxes.

Once students have grouped all of their underlined words from the poem, give students the important task of naming each group. Students can name their group with a single word, a phrase, or a sentence (if they are having trouble). The naming of the groups will give assessment insight into into how the students are interpreting the vocabulary of the poem. Ask students to share out the name and contents of their groups.

After students have completed the "Word Group" handout, they will begin to interpret their work, and in the process, their own feelings surrounding the content of their work. This next component of the activity does not require a handout but is generally most effective if done in a journal, or at least on a separate piece of paper that will be turned in. Ask students the following questions: What do your Word Groups tell you about the topic of the poem? What types of words or groups stand out to you as a reader? How do you feel about the words or groups you have categorized? What experience do you have surrounding the words used in this poem?

These questions are designed to help students become more conscientious about their own feelings regarding the poem's subject. Furthermore, helping students make connections between the poem and their own feelings/ experiences surrounding the topic of the poem will make them become more effective at interpreting a poem's mood.

This activity can also be brought back to being class centered after students have responded in their journals. Leading a discussion on what words were chosen, how they were grouped, and the reasoning behind the naming of each group is an effective way to not only check for understanding but also to validate the experiences of the students.

Silent Conversation – Silent conversation is an activity that involves the entire class and is designed to spark conversation as well as give voice to students who usually tend to stay silent during discussion. To execute this activity, one sheet of lined paper is required. This piece of paper will be passed around the class silently, with each student adding a comment or question about a text they are reflecting on. The end product will be a collection of statements, connections, opinions and feelings that can be used to spark a rich classroom discussion. It is most effective if the desks are aligned in a circle or square, essentially creating a single layered perimeter. This is done to ensure momentum as well as symbolize equal value of voice among all students.

Silent Conversation begins only after students have finished interpreting a poem by means of the reading strategies and activities previously listed in the unit. As facilitator, ask students to make one important comment about the text they just read. The specificity of the students' comments is up to the teacher, as struggling students may perform better if asked to respond to a specific questions such as, "What do you think the poem is about?" or "What can we learn from this poem?" Likewise, keeping responses unbound can also result in rich commentary if students have gained a comprehensive understanding of the text and, secondly, feel compelled to have their opinions heard. At any rate, remind students that this exercise is confidential, as teachers do not necessarily have to read back the comments from the beginning, or the correct order for that matter.

When executed properly, under the right classroom climate, students will share deep feelings evoked from a text that can then be used to establish relevancy and a connection to the world around them. Because this is not an activity that has a 'right' or 'wrong' answer, student work should be assessed based on participation and the thoughtfulness of their comment.

Assessment

There are a variety of assessment options that can help teachers effectively quantify the mastery of content by their students. But, just as importantly, these assessment options are also designed to help students feel empowered and inspired by giving them a creative outlet to share their voice.

Option 1 – Persuasive Essay: Many secondary education exit exams are known for their persuasive writing prompts. Thus, asking students to write following a persuasive prompt on the literary analysis of a poem's purpose, tone or mood is effective in that it not only helps teachers assess a student's ability to articulate their comprehension of a text but it also counts as great practice towards standardized tests.

Students can write an essay from a variety of angles regarding the texts of this unit. Students can be asked to persuade a reader why a particular poem is effective or ineffective, take a position on an author's tone, argue a poem's purpose, or defend a position on whether or not the poem induces mood 'x' or 'y.'

For more advanced learners, students can be asked to compare and/or contrast two poems that have similar/different purposes, tones, or moods. Students can write a paper on the people referred to as "they" in a poem. Lastly, students can be asked to write a persuasive paper on whether or not a particular poem in this unit should be considered 'activist' in nature. However, in doing the latter, a unit on social activism should precede this unit on social activist poetry.

Option 2 – Power Point Presentation: As a means to demonstrate content mastery students can create a power point presentation in which a poem's purpose, tone, mood, etc is analyzed in front of the class.

Students should choose a poem that resonates with them; a poem that speaks to an issue they deem significant. In trying to encourage students to become advocates for themselves by examining activist poetry, students may find they feel compelled to voice their opinions on issues they deal with in their community on a regular basis. Finding these poems can be difficult for students as they do not have the prior knowledge or access to content that teachers have. Finding a dozen poems or so for students to choose from may keep them from getting discouraged in the process, as well as give them more time to focus on interpretation and

production.

Students' power point presentations should be no longer than 10 slides in length. For students who have not had extensive experience with power point, a template should be used. For example, slide topics should be: Cover slide, the poem, background on author, purpose, tone, mood, personal connections, and significance. The student can then walk the class through the interpretation of each aspect of the poem as a means to demonstrate their understanding and mastery to the teacher.

Option 3 – Writing a Poem: The third, and final, summative assessment option is for students to write a poem. In order to ensure this assessment appropriately reflects the content in this unit, the process of writing the poem should include focusing the majority of effort on communicating a particular purpose, tone and/or mood. Students should also be encouraged to write about a social or political topic that is deemed significant or relevant to the lives of teenagers.

Students should first choose a topic. It may be helpful to list a variety of topics to help students get in touch with their own feelings surrounding relevant issues. If students are struggling finding a topic, suggest the following: teen violence, teen pregnancy, teen drug use, abusive homes, relationships, role models, cleaner communities, minimum wage, etc.

Once students have chosen a topic, they should begin considering what they want to communicate about their topic. This stage of prewriting concerns primarily with the tone of the poem. Ask students how they feel about the topic and in turn, what they want to say about the topic. Tell students they should focus on communicating one or two aspects of their topic. Students may also find it effective to write down a list of colorful words they want to include that will help distinguish the tone of their poem.

Next, students will need to dedicate a handful of lines in their poem to communicating a message or demand. This will serve as the poem's purpose. Ask students what they want readers to take away from the poem. What is one action readers should feel more inclined to do after reading the poem?

Lastly, after students have composed their poem they can share their poems in front of the class. To help encourage appropriate audience practices, assign students the task of interpreting the purpose, tone and mood of their classmates' poems. This activity is also a great way to build community and empower students by giving them a creative outlet to use their voice.

Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.6Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.

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