



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
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## **William Butler Yeats Meets an Eighth Grader from West Philadelphia**

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### **Introduction**

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According to British Poet Laureate Andrew Motion, “Poetry is the form we turn to instinctively at moments of intensity, whether it be to celebrate or grieve. Why? Because of its compression and distillations, its different perspectives, its meditative pace...”<sup>1</sup> A poet questions, argues, researches, learns, and describes every aspect of society. Our students process information and experiences in various means, and the classroom should be a haven for all thought.

Our students have the potential to be informative thinkers, critical citizens, and aesthetic poets. They have the ability to express deep and complicated emotions of adolescence in argumentative essays, expository writing, and metered lines. Many of our students’ writing portfolios are more filled with more informative essays than with various forms of poetry. There is a depth of emotional and collective understanding rooted in poetry that is missing. This lack of poetry is curtailing critical thought for both the teacher and student.

Many educators, including myself, are ignoring poetry. For the past two years, the administration and teachers at The Lea School in West Philadelphia focused on curriculum outlined by Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) for grades K-8. For two years in a row, my instruction was heavily focused on the informational standards for Pennsylvania Common Core for English because we were reading complicated, data-driven texts with challenging domain-specific vocabulary. In addition, our state testing is made up of 70% informational texts. I do not think I am a teacher who teaches to the tests, but I am drifting away from fiction and poetry in our students’ reading selections. This development is detrimental to our students’ critical thought and the scope of their writing portfolios.

This curriculum unit is designed for students in an eighth-grade English Language Arts class. Students will analyze a selection of poems about love and rebellion by William Butler Yeats through the approaches of New Criticism and historical and biographical contextualization. William Butler Yeats was a very famous and highly acclaimed 20<sup>th</sup>-century Irish poet and playwright. Autobiographical writings by Yeats and primary sources about Yeats’ personal life will be interwoven throughout the course. The most significant part of this unit is adding to the student writing portfolio of two to three poems.

## Content Objectives

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This unit is intended to last for three weeks. By the end of the first week, students will be able to identify and define characteristics of New Criticism in order to determine the meaning and purpose of the use of figurative language within the selected poems. My students know how to identify metaphor, similes, personification, imagery, various forms of rhyme, and hyperbole. More time will be spent within whole-group instruction and small guided instruction analyzing why Yeats used certain types of figurative language and how he used extended metaphors and symbolism to develop deeper meanings about love and rebellion.

Each 90-minute class period will be devoted to one or two of Yeats' poems depending on the scope of the poem and how much time students need to comprehend the tone, theme, and purpose of the poem. We will first start with poems about love: "The Falling of Leaves," "The Sorrow of Love," "Never Give all the Heart," and "When You Are Old." (In the content section of this unit, I will provide an analysis of "The Sorrow of Love.") Once the students have completed their readings and interpretations the poems about love, they will read excerpts from Yeats' autobiographical writings, which are located, along with the selected poems, in *The Yeats Reader*, a revised edition by Richard Finneran published in 2002. This revised edition contains an assortment of poems, plays, autobiographical and critical writings, and prose fiction by Yeats.

For the second week, students will identify and define historical and biographical contextualization in order to analyze a series of poems by Yeats entitled "The Fisherman," "September 1913," "Easter 1916." (In the content section, I will provide an analysis of "September 1913.") Students will synthesize the historical implications of the Irish nationalist movement in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while analyzing the purpose and tone of the poems. The majority of Yeats' poems are located on various websites, but one of most credible online resources is the Poetry Foundation website. There are audio recordings of most of his poems on this website. The second week of this unit will parallel the first week with students reading excerpts from Yeats' autobiographical writings that match his personal interpretation of many of the leading political figures and movements in Ireland.

Students will have one to two poems for publication by the end of the third and final week of the curriculum unit. Students will brainstorm, draft, revise, and submit a final draft for their writing portfolios. Students will ensure that their poems convey the purpose and emotions they wish to communicate with the use of figurative language, like metaphor and symbolism. Yeats used metaphor and symbolism and varied the length and stanza structure of his poems; students will be given certain guidelines and parameters about number of lines and stanzas needed.

## Demographics

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Henry C. Lea Elementary is located in West Philadelphia. It is a neighborhood school; children must live within a certain radius to attend Lea Elementary. English and Math classes for seventh and eighth grade are 90 minutes. For the past two years, I have taught the same group of students. I will be teaching the same group of students for the third year. I looped with them twice: sixth grade, seventh grade, and now they will be eighth graders. Three years ago, I advocated for looping due to the extensive research I was complying for

my graduate studies in Masters of Reading. Based on my students' DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment) results, 45% are on reading level, 30% are one or two grade levels behind, and 25% are multiple grade levels behind. This does not include the 11% of my students who are English Language Learners (ELL). Looping provides stability and strong expectations for the students and the teacher; if it were not for this process of looping, I would not feel in the position to teach poems and prose pieces by William Butler Yeats. Twenty percent of my student population has an IEP for reading and writing in which the modifications vary from extended time needed on formal assessments to the use of sentence starters, graphic organizers, and manipulatives to help them complete reading and writing assignments. Our entire student body population matches the criteria for CEP Economically Disadvantaged state funding: free breakfast and lunch and enrollment into an after-school program.

## Rationale

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### Why Yeats?

Selecting poems and autobiographical narratives from William Butler Yeats as the centerpiece for this unit is very unusual and ambitious. I am very certain that my students are capable and willing to read poems and prose by a 20<sup>th</sup>-century Irish writer. There are stark differences between Yeats and my students: time period, ethnicity, and community, but many of Yeats' struggles during his adolescence and young adulthood mirror conflicts experienced today by my students.

William Butler Yeats was born in Dublin, Ireland, but went to school in London, England because schools in Dublin were impoverished and barren due to the economic climate of Ireland in the 1860s. The Great Famine of the 1840s caused the deaths of one million Irish people, and over a million more emigrated to escape it.<sup>2</sup> Both Yeats and my students are proud of their home and nationality, but they have to seek opportunities to advance their quality of life outside their neighborhood and country. Yeats' father, John Butler Yeats, knew schools in Dublin would not offer his son the quality of education needed. Yeats excelled in school and was very popular and started to follow his own path towards prose and poetry, despite his father's wishes for him to pursue a different career.<sup>3</sup> Many of my students are constantly balancing what their parents want for them and what they want to do, especially students who are first-born American. In several of the poems selected for this unit, the class will analyze how Yeats expressed the conflict between his Irish nationalism and his experience as a student and published author in a different country.

Yeats wrote many poems and lyrical plays about Irish nationalism and rebellion throughout his adulthood, but one of the central conflicts of his early 20s was unrequited love. He fell in love with a young female actress and Irish activist who did not want to date or marry anyone. There is no greater topic for a middle-school student to expound than unrequited love. Yeats stated in his autobiographical writings that "on the 30<sup>th</sup> [January 1889] a hansom drove up to our door at Bedford Park [London] with Miss Maude Gonne and the troubling of my life began."<sup>4</sup> Middle-years students are very dramatic about love. Often our students struggle to effectively and appropriately express their feelings; verbal and physical arguments can ensue. Yeats was broken hearted over Gonne's constant objections to his infatuation and rejection of his myriad of marriage proposals. My students will find humor and authenticity in his poems about love and channel his dramatic emotions into their own writing.

Finally, Yeats' autobiographical writings are honest and clear. When contrasted with his poems, his prose writing is distinct and readily accessible. My students appreciate when adults admit their shortcomings or express sorrow for past mistakes. The emotions of pride, lust, responsibility, regret, and jealousy are developed throughout Yeats' poems, but the prose writing has a reflective and authentic tone. This contrast will help students understand the overall scope of Yeats' writing style without having to go into a full-fledged author's study. The unit's focus is on the poetry and how Yeats was able to elaborate on very complicated universal themes of love and rebellion, but the contrast of the poetry to the autobiographical writings will heighten students' sense of the creative and ingenious qualities of Yeats' poems.

### **Why New Criticism?**

New Criticism places emphasis on the literary work itself. Meaning can be derived solely from the words within the text. Outside understanding of historical or social context is irrelevant. According to Showalter, the poem is the favored pedagogical genre of New Criticism because the reader focuses on style and syntax, and that focus cultivates a richer analysis of the purpose of the text.<sup>5</sup> My students need the foundational skills of close reading and looking solely at the words of the poem in order to determine meaning. A New-Critical lens makes it possible for a simple but poignant reading and analysis for any literary work, especially poems. Through modeling, students will go line by line, word by word to determine the purpose and theme of the poems. Close reading establishes a sturdy foundation for my students to feel confident and equipped to analyze Yeats' poems and prose writing within a historical context, which will be offered to them post our initial reading.

Applying the methods of New Criticism to poetry appears to some critics to be paradoxical and contradictory to the very essence of poetry. Robert Scholes argues that New Critics are to blame for poetry's sad decline and diminished status.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, over analysis of poetry can have a negative impact on the reader's enjoyment of and the connection to the poem. Yet my students are very unfamiliar with poetic forms. If technical understanding is lacking, then students will not make the emotional and pertinent connections to the poems. In addition, Yeats' poems are layered with extended metaphors and symbolism that require a tremendous amount of discussion and re-reading, which I personally think is the joy of poetry. The words and the images presented in the poem change right in front of you. My students will have different interpretations and analyses that will spark dynamic conversation.

### **Why Historical and Biographical Contextualization?**

I am a proponent of New Criticism when first interpreting and analyzing any literary work, especially poetry. Yet "literary works are products of the past but their writing is never over and functions in the present."<sup>7</sup> We are therefore called to introduce to our students literary writing from the past that they normally would not encounter or read and show them its value and relevance. My students would never come across William Butler Yeats' plays or poems if I did not introduce them to my class. It is my role as an educator to show the similarities of themes and cultures of Yeats and my students. Implementing the some of the biographical and historical background of Yeats' life to selected poems within this unit will explain the significant impact Irish nationalism had on Yeats and his writing, especially in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> -century. Students will draw parallels to their experiences of social and political unrest in Philadelphia to Yeats' emotional response to the death and executions of Irish nationalists.

The main content of this unit is analysis of William Butler Yeats' poems and an explanation of how a teacher can help students expand their scope of analysis and develop an exceptional writing portfolio that includes

two to three poems. The teacher, however, must present historical and biographical information in order to understand the scope and context of the series of divides in the social and political classes in Ireland. In the content section of this unit, you will read my analysis of “September 1913” which contains information about the state of Ireland before World War I and biographical information about the several subjects in the poem. It is important to start analysis of “September 1913” with the New Criticism lens, but the teacher must also provide historical and biographical information to the students so they can still strive for analysis of Yeats’ tone, style, and purpose. It might be almost impossible to analyze the poem without the use of historical and biographical background information due to the many allusions of historical figures leading the Irish nationalist movement.

“September 1913” is a poem that portrays the major divisions of how to revolutionize and seek independence for the whole country—a country that is poor, hungry, and discriminatory towards several religions. Some people believed in a violent takeover. Other residents wanted a peaceful negotiation. Foremost, it was hostility to England that stirred the momentum of nationalism in Ireland; and according to Maurice Healy, an Irish nationalist politician, “this great racial conflict, which has been going on so long, which began in blood and suffering 700 years go...[will] continue to resound to the last syllable of recorded time.”<sup>8</sup> There were severe divisions between the Protestant and Catholic residents of Ireland along with Anglo-Irish (wealthier) and the Irish residents in the southern part of Ireland who wanted independence from England. Yeats stated that “Nationalist Ireland at the time was torn with every kind of political passion and prejudice...Nationalist propaganda disguised as literature.”<sup>9</sup> Even amongst his literary colleagues, Yeats felt judged and criticized for the content of several of his literary works, especially his plays, because he portrayed characters of Irish descent with flaws and vices.

Yeats liked developing complicated plots with interesting characters and did not write away flaws and prejudices to serve the Irish nationalist movement. As he said in *Reveries Over Childhood and Youth*, “We should write out our own thoughts in as nearly as possible the language we thought them in, as though in a letter to an intimate friend.” The main protagonists in several of Yeats’ plays are of Irish descent and have character flaws that are very relatable and sometimes hilarious. Yeats wanted to write popular and entertaining plays and beautiful poetry, and feared the Nationalist movement was fueled by hatred and prejudices that would only further divide Ireland.

### **Why Develop a Student Portfolio?**

The most significant and relevant part of this curriculum unit is the development of the students’ writing portfolios. Once students have completed their analysis of Yeats’ poems about love and rebellion in conjunction with his autobiographical writings and supplemental historical context, they will develop and publish their own poems about love and rebellion. “Students also benefit greatly from the portfolio’s providing a concrete place in which they can see their own work grow. Students review their work to write the self-reflexive essay, they can see for themselves how much more sophisticated their thinking has become.”<sup>10</sup> This means writing poetry enhances all other forms of writing for students: their informative and argumentative writing will benefit from the different processes of emotional thought. A student has to be very particular about his or her word choice when writing poetry, and he or she will often revise and edit one or two lines over and over again to portray a poignant theme.

As a seventh-and eighth-grade English teacher at The Lea School, I developed and taught several units about energy, natural resources, and water scarcity in collaboration with our Middle Years Science teacher. The units were strong and challenged our students to connect literature to science and social responsibility. Yet

something was missing. There was a lack of expression; there was a lack of poetry. There is beauty and chaos in the engineering process, and the students did an incredible job with their research and lab reports. There were moments when students completely failed in their experiment, and others barely passed the assignment with their model or invention; I did not make the connection that my students needed to write it about their successes and failures. They did not put into writing those moments of frustration, anger, and elation. I modeled for them how to develop a thesis statement, write a lab report, and research paper. That was their chance to develop a book of prose and poetry based on science. I failed to bring in poems and prose to humanize these global issues and what they were experiencing as emerging scientists and thinkers.

## Content

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### Analysis of “Sorrow of Love”

For the analysis that follows, I spent several hours annotating, re-reading, and researching this one particular poem by Yeats. The purpose of this analysis is to help the teacher become familiar with some biographical information about Yeats and his writing style. During the actual instruction of this unit, the teacher is encouraged to elicit responses and interpretations from his or her students. It is the role of the teacher to set the foundation for analysis, but student responses stir the debate and discourse. Throughout the entire analysis of each poem, there are elements of New Criticism and contextualization based on the history of Ireland and the biography of William Butler Yeats during the late part of the 19<sup>th</sup> -century and early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> -century. I am sure other teachers, especially those who were former English majors, would agree that spending several hours developing an analysis of Yeats’ poems in coffee shops near Yale University was a pleasure.

“The Sorrow of Love” was first published in 1893 in a collection of poems by William Butler Yeats entitled *The Rose*. This is a three-stanza poem with four lines in each stanza with abab end rhyme with similar meters. Like many of Yeats’ poems, this one uses classical allusion, imagery, and symbolism to portray the depths of emotional turmoil a person can experience when he or she is in love. With the title, Yeats establishes a negative connotation associated often with unrequited love or being so enamored by love one does things not normally done. In the final stanza, Yeats changes that tone and presents “the sorrow of love” as a punishment.

Each of Yeats’ stanzas in this poem portrays one of Kubler-Ross’ stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. In the first stanza, the speaker feels denied of his emotional grief and turmoil by the aesthetic characteristics of nature: “brawling of a sparrow,” “brilliant moon,” “milky sky,” and “harmony of leaves.” The “sparrow” has more of a presence and voice within the scene than the actual man in crisis. The speaker is not mentioned until the fourth and final line of the stanza. The natural elements “blot” or disfigure the man and his voice. The subject is unable to find comfort or healing within nature. Carol Rumes, contributing writer of *The Guardian*, associates “blotted out” to “man’s image and his cry” with writing: “Is the young poet who wants to create a unique new voice for Ireland hinting that he is oppressed by the power of classical stories and symbols?”<sup>11</sup> Writers often cross out words or crumple up sheets of paper, because they do not like what they wrote and want to start over. Some writers worry their literary work might be a failure and ruin their careers. Yeats is often concerned about the development of his voice, but he did not fear criticism. He associates himself to his Irish heritage, but this poem calls into question the purpose of love.

Yeats' voice is not oppressed by Greek mythology, but rather it is an inspiration for many of his literary works. Yeats will sensualize this pain through the use of classical allusion in order to stress the relevance and need for human comfort. Man's image and cry are blotted or disfigured because nature is not providing the comfort needed to mend a broken heart.

In the second stanza, "the girl" is the cause of the sorrow and heartache of the speaker and, ironically, she is also the potential healer of this man's strife. This bargaining stage of grief plagued Yeats for many years in his personal life. Yeats fell in love with Maude Gonne, an English-born actress who met Yeats while he was studying in England in 1889. "A man young as I could not have differed from a woman so beautiful and so young...She walked like a goddess...her complexion was luminous, like the apple-blossom through which light falls..."<sup>12</sup> Yeats pursued Gonne for over thirty years, despite several rejections of his marriage proposals, which spanned from 1891-1916. "Sometimes, I had gone to sleep with the endeavor to send my soul to that of Maud Gonne," wrote by Yeats in his *Memoirs* in 1916. For Yeats, Gonne was the "greatness of the world" because she advocated for Irish independence and helped political prisoners escape from jail.<sup>13</sup>

Students can analyze the important role of "the girl" even before biographical contextualization. The color "red" represents passion, lust, strength, and desire. Yeats amplifies her prominent role in this love affair with words like "arose" and "seemed the greatness of the world in tears." The "girl" is mourning an exceptional loss but is unable to leave her realm of despair; she is "doomed like Odysseus" and "proud as Priam". This "girl" has the authority to change a man's destiny in the same way war and Greek gods test a man's strength and loyalty. The classical allusions used in this poem, Odysseus and Priam, are references that my students will enjoy and will analyze further because they read many Greek myths and have seen many movies about the Trojan War. Priam, the King of Troy, loves his son, Hector, and wants a proper burial for him. Achilles, a Greek hero and soldier in the Trojan War, killed Hector outside the gates of Troy and dragged his body around for twelve days. Priam has to beg for the return of his son's body for proper burial on enemy territory from Achilles, and begging is an unnatural act for a powerful king. Yeats describes this love so powerful that it brings kings to a state of pleading. The "sorrow of love" could make a man risk his own life, return home after years of wayward and impossible journeys, or compare the greatness of a nation to one girl with "red mournful lips."

Yeats' use of repetition is a stylistic choice to elaborate on the symbolic role of the "girl" in the third and final stanza. The girl is more important than warriors, kings, and nations. She is the "climbing moon upon an empty sky." In Yeats' critical writings from *The Symbolism of Poetry*, he writes, "there are intellectual symbols, symbols that evoke ideas alone, or ideas mingled with emotions."<sup>14</sup> The tone of the poem entirely changes in the third stanza due to the repetition of the word "arose" in association with the girl and her ability to "compose man's image and cry." The use of words like "clamorous" and "lamentation" evoke a feeling of chaos and despair. Every natural element in stanza three is described differently with a strong negative connotation: "clamorous eaves," "empty sky," and "lamentation of the leaves." It is a complete shift from the first and second stanza in which nature is aesthetic. Once a man experiences the sorrow of love, he finds himself in a "clamorous" and mournful state. Once a man compares a girl to a "climbing moon" she is out of his reach; she is unattainable. There is a tremendous amount of sorrow with unrequited love, but grief is part of the human experience. If we never felt vulnerable or woeful, our emotional threshold would be weak.

### **Analysis of "September 1913"**

In terms of analysis of this particular poem, I think that it is important for me to note to the reader how much time I spent learning about Irish nationalism and several of the subjects mentioned in the poem and their

political and religious affiliations including John O’Leary, Edward Fitzgerald, Robert Emmett, and Wolfe Tone. I encourage the teacher to spend time reading excerpts from books and articles about Irish nationalism listed in the teacher resources section of this curriculum unit. I also encourage the teacher to spend time talking to one’s colleague in the Social Studies Department; you might be able to co-teach and share responsibility of content, so the focus can still remain in the English classroom on the style and purpose of poetic forms.

“September 1913” is a four-stanza poem with a total 32 lines, following the abab end rhyme scheme pattern. It was first published in *The Irish Times*, a Protestant nationalist daily newspaper in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Yeats wrote this poem in response to a decision made by Dublin Corporation, also known as Dublin City Council, to deny building an art gallery to house paintings owned by Sir Hugh Lane, a very talented artist and collector and Lady Gregory’s nephew.<sup>15</sup> Lady Gregory co-founded the Irish Literary Theatre with William Butler Yeats in 1899. Resistance towards this artistic movement puzzled Yeats. Yeats was distraught that William Martin Murphy, a prominent leader within the anti-union movement, would argue against public support and financial donations for the gallery. It was corrupted figures like Murphy who caused great turmoil for people like Yeats who wanted a strong and independent Ireland, but did not want politicians like Murphy to lead the country.

Despite the rich historical and biographical context of the poem, it is important to start with the New Critical approach with the students and then immerse the students in information about the subjects mentioned in the poem. Students can analyze the use of figurative language, identify and define unfamiliar words, and discuss the purpose of the poem. Without this foundation, students will not be able to understand how Yeats develops the biographical and historical information about the figures who are symbols within the poem.

The first line of the poem is syntactically unusual for Yeats: “what need you, being come to sense,” translates to “what do you need now that you have come to your senses?” This syntactical inversion sets the tone for the entire poem; it is a mockery and judgment of religious ferment, especially Catholic practices like almsgiving (“add the halfpence to the pence”) and prayer (“prayer to shivering prayer.”) Yeats was very frustrated with the religious and social divide of Ireland, Anglo-Irish Protestants versus the growing number of Catholics in the poorer sections of southern Ireland. Yeats wanted to affirm his Irish nationality and renew the romanticism and imagination rooted in Irish art and landscape. It is evident that Yeats is developing a staunch opposition to the heroic efforts of Irish separatists, like John O’Leary of the Irish Republican Brotherhood to present nationalists of 1913.

Yeats writes about O’Leary with fondness and gratitude in several of his autobiographical writings because they were friends and O’Leary wanted Yeats to become a prominent member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood with his literary talents. Yeats wrote more poems about Irish legends and folklore. This fondness and high regard for O’Leary and his tremendous sacrifice for Ireland are reasons for the repeated lines, “Romantic Ireland’s dead and gone, / It’s with O’Leary in the grave.” In addition, Yeats establishes O’Leary’s legacy as spellbinding and captivating as “names that stilled your childish play.” Yeats does not offer a solution or answer to what is plaguing many minds in Ireland about whether or not the Nationalist movement has lost its direction and purpose in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yeats developed this poem into a form of an elegy for a dear friend whom he missed deeply.



## Teaching Strategies

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I am an English teacher, and I follow the Children’s Literacy Initiative Framework that was adopted by the School District of Philadelphia for teaching reading and writing in a middle-school classroom. I value the structure of this framework. It is an effective model and establishes routines within the classroom. When I first started teaching middle school, I was overwhelmed with implementing this framework, but after four years I see this framework as successful and efficient. It is crucial to note that each component of the literacy block is not executed everyday. It varies due to the needs of my students and my need to adapt the instruction post assessments.

Teachers using this unit can vary their approach according to the needs of their students, but my students will not start to write their poems until after all selected poems for this unit are read. This will allow for a smoother transition into the writing portfolio because students will have a greater understanding of Yeats’ writing style and craft after the two weeks of analysis. They can focus solely on their development of poetic forms in terms of love and rebellion through the use of the writing workshop model: brainstorm, draft, review with teacher and peer, revise, self edit, and publication.<sup>16</sup> All of the components mentioned below are part of the Children’s Literacy Framework.

### **Shared Reading: Whole Group Instruction**

The teacher reads out loud and models close reading based on the objective and standard. Sometimes, the students have the text in front of them, and sometimes they do not, depending on the length of the text. My students will have the poems in front of them while I read out loud. Teachers model for students repeatedly through this shared reading approach. I will model repeatedly a shared reading of poems and prose pieces by Yeats. Most of the supplemental reading, biographical and historical information about Yeats and Ireland, will be read in small groups or cooperative pairs.

### **Collaborative Reading: Whole Group Instruction**

The teacher and students read out loud excerpts of the text and share their close reading interpretation and analysis of the text with the whole class. Students are highlighting, making notes on the side, and fostering a debate. The teacher is a facilitator and calls on students to read and share their interpretations. The teacher might also ask clarifying questions and reiterate the objective and purpose of the lesson.

### **Cooperative Pairs and Guided Reading: Small-Group Instruction**

Teachers assign students a cooperative pair based on reading level and skill ability. For example, a teacher will pair a student with similar reading levels and comprehension abilities to work with each other on a text. While students are working with their partners, a teacher can have a guided reading section with four to five other students. Again, this guided reading group combines two cooperative pairs that need additional support with the main idea, vocabulary, or summarization. A teacher presents a different mini lesson for each guided reading group based on the need. Cooperative pairs are answering questions which require textual evidence, drawing conclusions, inferences, or text-to-text connections. Cooperative pairs will turn in their completed assignment to the teacher in order for the teacher to provide immediate feedback and to restructure tomorrow’s lesson for students who need additional help and students who are ready to move on to another objective.

## **Independent Assessment and Independent Reading: Individual Instruction**

Once a week, students are formally assessed based on a specific objective and standard. During this time, students are reading independently a text at their reading level. Students respond to the content of the text and answer assessment questions that are developed based on the objective and standard. Teachers should select texts that reflect the same theme or central idea being studied in the unit, but that is at the discretion of the teacher. During this unit, I will assess a student's understanding of figurative language and the purpose of a poem based on Yeats' poems discussed in class. Students will have to annotate and answer questions based on the style, structure, and tone of Yeats' poems.

The Children's Literacy Framework for writing follows the exact same form of gradual release. Due to the nature of this unit, students will spend more time with their cooperative pairs so they revise and edit their poems based on effective feedback. I want students to feel inspired by the universal themes presented in Yeats' poems and not feel pressured to mimic Yeats' writing styles in the various poems we analyze in class. This is the first time this group of students will have samples of poetry in their writing portfolio. Students will be encouraged to read out loud their finished poems to the class and their work will be displayed in the classroom. Students are independently assessed with a final draft based on the writing rubrics of the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment.

## **Classroom Activities**

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Close reading is the process of analyzing a literary work based on the language, structure, and syntax of the piece. Students define unfamiliar words, look for repeated images or phrases, identify central themes, and analyze the purpose of the literary work. Students are focusing solely on what they see in the text. Annotating means writing comments and or questions about the literary work in the margins or on a separate sheet of paper. See Figure 1.1 of my personal annotations of "Sorrow of Love" by William Butler Yeats.

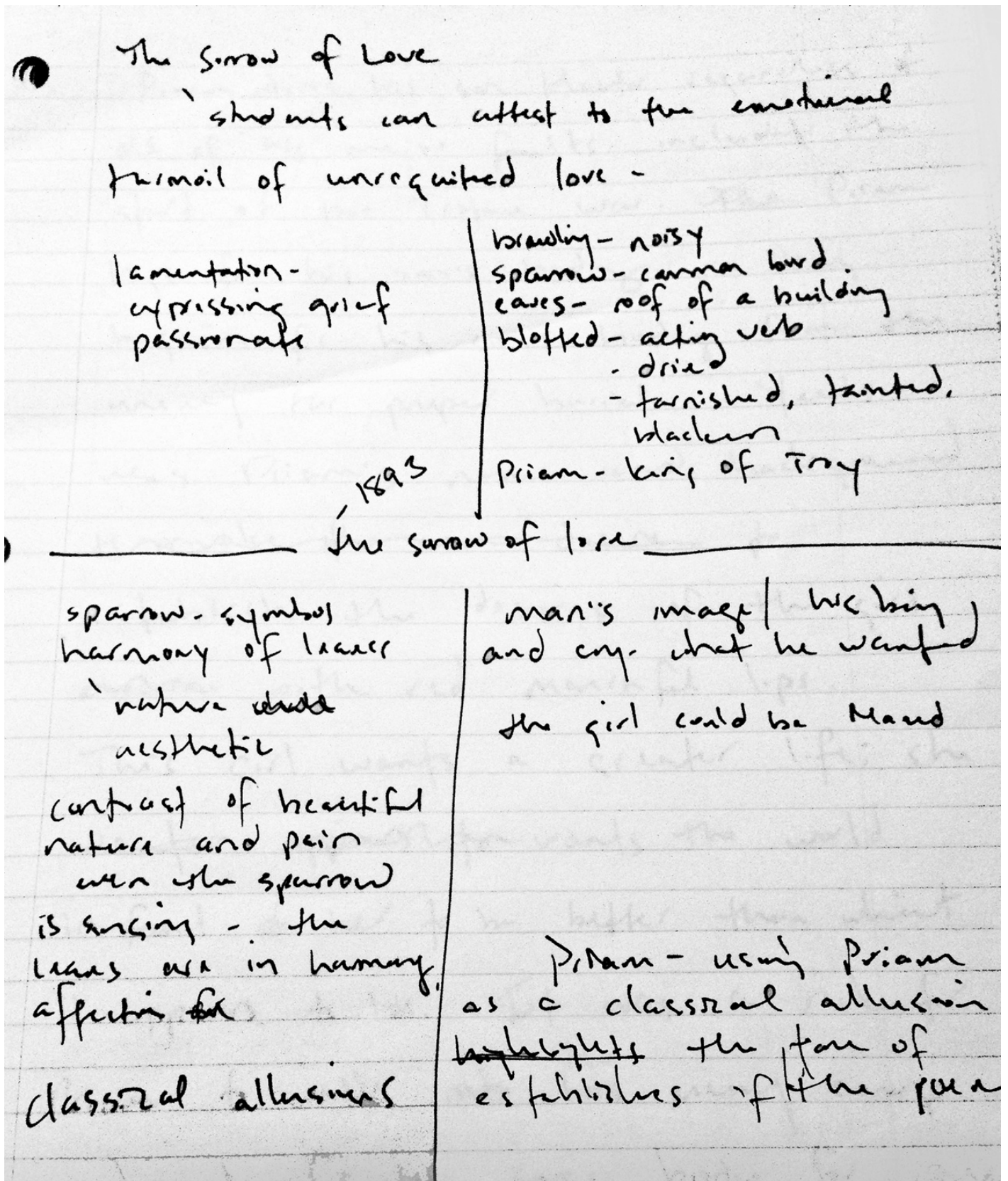


Figure 1.1 Close Reading Annotations

Close reading is not the final step in understanding a literary work, especially poetry. Students will use their annotations as a sounding board for further discussion and debate about the purpose of a literary work.

Without annotating a text, a student will have a difficult time developing an analytical and critical writing piece because students use their notes to form thesis statements and subtopics. A student will also struggle with organization and synthesis of ideas within their writing without first pinpointing key ideas in the literary work they are analyzing.

I will meet with each student during the third week of this unit. Individual writing conferences should last five to ten minutes for each student in order for the teacher to read drafts of the student's poems and provide immediate feedback. The student should leave the writing conference with a clear direction. I will provide for each student a reflection sheet with my comments about his or her poem. During the individual writing conference, students should not hesitate to ask questions. The conference should be a conversation between the poet and critic. (I have provided a conference reflection sheet below in teacher resources.)

Students are encouraged to read out loud their final poems to the class with a visual or multimedia representation. Students who choose to read their poems out loud to the class can play an appropriate song that shares a similar theme, display visual art that connects to the imagery of the poem, or discuss a political or social figure associated with their poem. Student presentations promote student voice and further discussion about the central themes of the unit: unrequited love and rebellion.

## Bibliography/Teacher and Student Resources

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Bloom, Harold. *Yeats*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972. Teachers can use this book as an additional resource for biographical and historical context about William Butler Yeats.

Boyce, George. *Nationalism in Ireland*. New York: Routledge, 2004. This resource was very helpful as I continued to further my research and education on the economic and political state of Ireland in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and how it impacted Yeats' development of universal themes in his poetry and plays about Irish nationalism. Most of my reading was in the second half of the book when he started to outline John O'Leary's mission with the Irish Republic Brotherhood. In addition, you can rent the book on Amazon on a Kindle.

Collins, Billy. "The Companionship of a Poem." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

November 23, 2001. Students would really like this essay by Collins because it describes exactly what they are going to be doing in this unit. It is a very sophisticated text, but I think some of my students could read this article with their cooperative pairs and write a reflective journal using Abram's triangle: author, world, and reader.

Connor, Lester. *A Yeats Dictionary: Persons and Places in the Poetry of William Butler Yeats*. Syracuse University Press, 1999. I never studied Yeats before and I really needed a visual guide and understanding of the geography of where he grew up, went to school, and many of the various parks and landscapes of Ireland and London that inspired some of the natural imagery in his poetry and plays.

"Digital History." Digital History. Accessed July 12, 2016. [http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/voices/irish\\_potato\\_famine.cfm](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/voices/irish_potato_famine.cfm). This website provides students and teachers with a brief overview of the Irish Potato Famine with factual information.

Foster, R. F. W. *B. Yeats: A Life, Vol. I: The Apprentice Mage*. New York: Oxford UP, 1997.

Foster, R. F. W. *B. Yeats: A Life, Vol. II: The Arch-Poet 1915-1939*. New York: Oxford UP, 2003. These two volumes present a wealth of information and insight into the whole life of Yeats. They are many pictures of Yeats' family and friends in both books, which also span his whole life. I think my students would like to see the pictures of his family, his school, the theatre, and his home in London and Sligo.

Harpur, James. "Romantic Ireland: Yeats and 'The Irish Times', Poetry on Newsprint." *The Irish Times*. Accessed August 6, 2016. <http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/romantic-ireland-yeats-and-the-irish-times-poetry-on-newsprint-1.1509856>. This is a very persuasive essay about the 100<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of "September 1913." This article could be shared with students after their analysis of the poem.

Heard, Georgia. *Awakening the Heart: Exploring Poetry in Elementary and Middle School*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1999. This book offers a mini-refresher course on theory and practice behind writing workshops for poetry within a classroom. There is not much difference between an informative writing workshop versus a poetry workshop, but I realized I might need to plan for extended time for brainstorming and revision for my students. This is the first time they are writing poetry for their portfolios, and they might be hesitant at first.

Rumens, Carol. "Poem of the Week: The Sorrow of Love by WB Yeats." *The Guardian*. 2010. Accessed July 22, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2010/aug/09/poem-of-the-week-wb-yeats>. Rumens offers intelligent and insightful analysis. She analyzes the use of symbolism and allusions within the poem. Students could read this article after they interpreted the poem individually and compare analysis.

Showalter, Elaine. *Teaching Literature*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003. I mostly used Chapter 4: "Teaching Poetry" to support my teaching strategies and develop some classroom activities. I was so excited to read that she was a teacher at Friends Select in Philadelphia. I coach crew at Friends Select, and I really liked her writing style.

Yeats, W. B., Ed. Richard J. Finneran. *The Yeats Reader: A Portable Compendium of Poetry, Drama, and Prose*. New York: Scribner, 1997. This is an incredible resource for teachers and students. This book contains various writings from Yeats, including poems, plays, and prose writing. This book is outlined very clearly, and it was a pleasure to read.

Name:

Date:

Ms. Radebaugh: English

**Objective: Students will be able to identify the use of figurative language (imagery and symbolism) in order to determine tone and purpose of the poem**

**Close Reading: Make a prediction, underline words or phrases that you do not understand or cannot define, annotate the use of figurative language, determine tone and purpose**

**The Fisherman**

**BY WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS**

Copy and paste the poem in the center of this worksheet

**Guided Questions on “The Fisherman” Cooperative Pairs:**

1. Identify the use of imagery
2. Identify the two to three uses of paradox or contrast
3. Identify the use of simile, especially the concluding simile and determine the speaker’s purpose
4. Argue who is the fisherman in relation to text to reader and text to world

Name:

Date:

Ms. Radebaugh: English

**Objective for Individual Writing Conference: Students will be able to revise and edit their personal draft of the writing assignment based on the teacher’s feedback in order to develop a**

## final draft

Assignment for student:

Content and style requirements for the student:

1. Use of symbolism or an extended metaphor
2. Development of one universal theme: love or rebellion
3. Two to three stanzas of four lines with similar meters; end rhyme (abab is an option but not mandated)

Student's strengths evident in this draft:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Improvements needed for student to achieve publication

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## Appendix: Common Core State Standards for Pennsylvania

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Standard - CC.1.2.6.C

Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, and elaborated in a text.

The key individual is William Butler Yeats. Students will read biographical and historical information about Yeats to further their understanding of his poems and prose pieces.

Standard - CC.1.3.7.A

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

Unrequited love and rebellion are two themes discussed in this unit. Poems selected for this unit focus on these two themes, and students will write their own poems focusing on unrequited love and rebellion.

Craft and Structure: Vocabulary

Standard -CC.1.2.6.F

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in grade level reading and content, including interpretation of figurative language in context.

Students will identify and define examples of figurative language used within Yeats' poems. Students will develop a symbol or metaphor within their own poems.

Informative/Explanatory Content

1.4.6.C: Develop and analyze the topic with relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples; include graphics and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

Students will listen to recordings of Yeats' poems and are encouraged (not mandated) to read out loud their final poems to the class with a visual cue.

## Endnotes

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1. Elaine Showalter, *Teaching Literature*, 63.
2. "The Irish Potato Famine". Digital History. 7 November 2008. Retrieved 8 November 2008.
3. R. F. Foster *W. B. Yeats: A Life, Vol. I: The Apprentice Mage*, 35.
4. Yeats, W. B. *The Yeats Reader*, 295.
5. Showalter, *Teaching Literature*, 23.
6. *Ibid.*, 63.
7. Harold Bloom, *Yeats*, 168.
8. George Boyce. *Nationalism in Ireland*, 215.
9. *Ibid.*
10. John Webster, *The Elizabethan Age Portfolio: Using Writing to Teach Shorter Elizabethan Poetry*
11. Carol Rumen. "Poem of the Week: The Sorrow of Love by WB Yeats."
12. Yeats, *The Yeats Reader*, 295.
13. R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life, Vol. I: The Apprentice Mage*, 202.
14. Yeats, *The Yeats Reader*, 374.
15. Harpur, James. "Romantic Ireland".
16. Georgia Heard, *Awakening the Heart: Exploring Poetry in Elementary and Middle School*, 190

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