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Philadelphia, Do you See What I See?

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Introduction

Poetry has gotten a bad rap these days. Most recently a colleague of mine told me that her principal gave her a difficult time about using a poetry lesson for her formal evaluation. I was shocked! She teaches second grade, so I struggled to think of words to ease her anxiety about getting a poor rating on her observation. Then I remembered that poems are a part of our Pennsylvania standardized tests in each grade. That seemed to make her feel better. Once I got over the shock, I lamented that poetry seemed to have lost its appeal in the general public. We were reminded in our seminar, “Poetry and Public Life” with Professor Paul Fry that there are places such as Ireland where every town or inn seemed to have their own Poet Laureate. Maybe if we could bring poetry back to the classroom, engaging our students in the fun of finding and using words that excite them, students could find a way to improve their reading and writing skills and in the process learn a little bit about themselves.

Poetry has a way of bringing out our thoughts and feelings in a way that gets to the heart of the matter. Although children may not have a large vocabulary, they do have the ability to speak their minds without the inhibitions or filters that adults have. That is what makes teaching poetry so exciting and refreshing. Students can become word wizards, which is what I call writers who have a way with words. Bringing out this talent or skill takes time, patience, and practice. It is important that students are given time to cultivate this skill, both by being exposed to good poetry readings and by practicing writing different types of poetry.

This unit will cover public poetry as a form of poetry that speaks to the condition of life. Students will look at poetry that makes a statement about city life – warts and all. Reading standards for fourth graders include explaining major differences between poems, drama, and prose and referring to the structural elements of each when writing or speaking about a text. Introducing different forms of poetry will be a part of the unit, but not necessarily the focus of the unit. Students will read to understand ideas and elements of poems so that they are able to write poetry that does not necessarily copy a poets’ style, but provides ideas for students to latch onto when writing.

This four-week unit is intended for fourth graders (and can be easily modified for fifth graders) of varying reading and writing levels in a large urban setting. Because the unit includes two walking tours and is four weeks long, it does not have to be completed in consecutive weeks, but could be completed in a marking period of approximately six to seven weeks. In 2016-2017, 100% of our student population qualified for free or

reduced lunch. Our students are approximately 29% African American, 61% Latino with 9% listed as white or other. Our district's K-5 Reading Initiative is for all students to read at grade level by the end of third grade. We have seen improvements in the last couple of years and, at the same time, continue to have students in fourth grade whose reading levels span from first grade through seventh grade. This presents challenges for teachers who adjust and modify reading lessons to reach all students. This unit will address some of these concerns in the strategies and lesson activities sections.

Objectives

This unit is intended to last for four weeks. By the end of the first week, students will be able to identify poetry as a specific form of writing and the elements of a poem. Students will explore figurative language, personification, imagery, structure and tone. Students will create heart maps, which will assist students in using descriptive words and thinking about their lives, their family, and their homes. During this week students will look at personal and public poetry, identifying what each looks like, and be able to identify these forms of poetry using examples of poems from Jack Prelutsky and Shel Silverstein. We will look at poems as a whole class and ask students to “vote” on whether the poem is a public or private poem. Students will then work in small groups with two or three poems to decide which poems are public and private. These lessons will provide a working background for studying poetry and get their creative minds flowing.

During the second week, students will be introduced to Kenneth Koch's “poetry ideas” and create poems using this method of poetry writing. Students will look at their neighborhood to write make observations and reflections. Using a modified version of “A Map to the Town,”¹ students will create a poem using the directions of this poetry game. Students will have time to write/revise this poem and share out in the classroom. Rudyard Kipling's poem, “Philadelphia” will be introduced next. It will be read aloud to students and the whole class will analyze it using theme and purpose of the poem. Students will be asked to share what stories they tell others about living in Philadelphia. Students will work together in small groups, creating a mind map of their stories. They will use these stories along with a class list of great things found in the city to write a class poem on Philadelphia.

The third week will include a walking tour of a historic section of Philadelphia. During this walking tour students will use their poetry journal books to record observations, images, reflections, wonderings about the sites. Carl Sandburg's poem, “Chicago” will be introduced next. It will be read aloud, while students read along. In small groups, they will determine what the author is trying to say (purpose) and the tone. Students will use their notes from the walking tour and determine what stuck out for them as Philadelphians. They will use this information to write the first one or two stanzas of their poem. For the final stanza or two, students will compare what they think and feel about Philadelphia comparing this to what they have learned during the walking tour. Another idea would be have students gather information on how outsiders feel about Philadelphia and use that information to write the final stanza or two.

During the fourth week, students will analyze Walt Whitman's poem “The Great City.” The poem will be read aloud while students read along. After discussing the purpose and tone, students will use the poetry idea - write about what Philadelphia is and what it is not. Students will work together to create a T-chart to list things Philadelphia is known for or what can be found in the city versus things that cannot be found in Philadelphia or things they are not known for. The T-charts will be shared and posted in the classroom for

students to use to create their own poem. Using speaking and listening skills, students will create a podcasts of their poems.

Background/Rationale

Why poetry? Georgia Heard wrote that she has seen the transformational power of poetry. She recounts stories of students who have lost parents to drug abuse, or parents who were in jail, or who have felt abused or neglected. Heard wrote, “The real lessons poetry can teach are what I call life lessons”.² Students need an avenue to let their feeling and thoughts maneuver through. They need to release their anger, frustration, fears, and anxieties. Heard believes that poetry is the vehicle that will help students reach into their “well of feelings” and help them to articulate what it is that they are feeling.

Students today are exposed to so much more than students were just 15 to 20 years ago. Living in the city, students see and hear more than they should. Students tell me about seeing and hearing people getting shot, drugs being used, children being hit by cars, and people arguing and fighting, both physically and verbally. Because of technology, they have access not only to breaking news around the world; they also are connected with friends and family up to the minute - *live*. Without a way to express the affect this has on their bodies and minds, students have a difficult time expressing what they are feeling. What I see happening at school each day is students coming to school looking sad, angry, hungry, and defeated. Although poetry will not solve these social problems, it can help students put words to what they are experiencing, what they wish they could change about their circumstances, and how they can see their city or neighborhood (their existence) in a different light.

Public Poetry

Private poetry deals with the individual activity of the self. When a poet deals with public themes that affect him or her, such as politics and war, they look not only within themselves, but also on what they hear from others and from today what we call mass media. Public poetry has been around for centuries and has been critical in understanding the thoughts and hearts of people living in difficult times. In public poetry, the artist has to direct their attention inward and outward. Michael Thurston adds that, “(a) t the same time, we are at one with the community of viewers, hearers, readers. We unite with the ‘humanity’ with whom we share both senses and values.”³ Poets, in writing public poetry, carry the burden of understanding their own hearts and minds in a given situation and in connecting and reflecting on the values of the community at large while maintaining poetic form and structures.

Adrienne Rich feels that poetry should be taught in schools. It should be exciting and there should be television shows, videos, and poetry games to interest our young students. We do not hear about poetry as an art form as much as we do about paintings, fiction and non-fiction books, music, movies, or television shows. Perhaps there is not enough money to be had by commercial interests to warrant the investment in poetry. Rich wrote in 1993 that around the United States there must be several thousand poetry readings a night and listed all the places you could find them. I wonder if this is still true today. Rich’s hope is that poetry remains simple and inexpensive enough that it will “never become leashed to profit, marketing, and consumerism.”⁴

Introducing public poetry in my classroom will serve several purposes. Giving students a forum in which to safely write and discuss their experiences and feelings about living in an urban setting, in a section of the city that includes abandoned homes, unkempt homes, abandoned cars, litter, graffiti, homelessness, and constant noise will help them to express in words what they are experiencing without the fear of reprisal or reproach from family or their community. Students will hear about poets who use allegory and figurative language in order to allow the reader to work out the possible meanings and make connections to events in the world or personal experiences.

Rudyard Kipling

The first poem I would like to introduce to my students, after completing a few lessons introducing public poetry, is called "Philadelphia" by Rudyard Kipling. Kipling was born in 1865 in Bombay, India and died in 1936. At about six years old, he was taken to Southsea England to learn how to read and write in English. Unfortunately, he spent almost six years in a house that was owned by an old Navy Captain and his wife who took in children whose parents lived in India. He was abused physically and emotionally by "the woman", which is how he refers to the Captain's wife, in his book, *Something of Myself*. During his stay, he began having trouble with his eyesight (because he was banned from reading and had to hide in poorly lit rooms to read) and had what might be called a nervous breakdown - he was having hallucinations. Eventually his aunt, who lived in England, found out what was happening and wrote Rudyard's mother. His mother traveled back to England and took Rudyard out of the house - interestingly enough, his sister was to stay there for a couple more years, as she did not receive the same treatment. He eventually attended Westward Ho! a school where 75% of the students were born outside of England, and whose fathers had been in the army.

Finally at 16, Kipling returned home. He worked on the editorial staff of a daily paper of the Punjab, the *Civil and Military Gazette*, where he wrote that he never worked less than ten hours as the daily paper came out each evening. He wrote a book of verse, one book of prose, and stories for the Pioneer Weekly, including a set of six small volumes of his tales while working there. After six and a half years, he left India for England in 1889. After he married, he and his wife traveled around the world. They ended up living in a cottage in New England where he began to write the stories of Mowgli in *The Jungle Book*.

In 1910, Kipling wrote *Rewards and Fairies*, which is a historical fantasy featuring short stories set in historical times. I think it is important to put the book in context in order to understand the poem. Dan and Una meet Puck, a fairy, who conjures up real and fictional characters to tell the children stories about historic events that are not necessarily accurate. The poem "Philadelphia" appears in the chapter entitled, "Brother Square-toes," a tale about a boy who travels to Philadelphia and meets Apothecary Tobias Hirte of 118 Second Street who takes the boy, Pharaoh, under his wing. Pharaoh meets Red Jacket, a Seneca Chief, through Tobias and gives Pharaoh the Seneca name, "Brother Square-toes." Red Jacket and Pharaoh travel south to meet George Washington to ask him if the United States was planning to fight with France against England. President Washington assures Red Jacket that the United States will not fight in this war.

Count Charles Maurice Talleyrand de Perigord, from France, traveled to America to talk the President into helping France fight against England. Talleyrand is known for being King Louis' Ambassador to England until King Louis' was beheaded. Talleyrand ran back to Paris and enjoined Danton, King Louis' murderer, to send him back to England as the new Ambassador of the French Republic. The English did not take this kindly and kicked him out of England. He fled to America with no money and met Toby, Pharaoh and Red Jacket in Philadelphia. Talleyrand tried to talk Pharaoh into telling him exactly what the President said to the French Ambassador before he went back to France having failed to talk Washington into joining their fight.

Washington asked Red Jacket only to tell others that “there will be no war.” Pharaoh honored their wishes and would not give Talleyrand any other information, which Talleyrand had to accept.

Before we get to the first section of the poem, a few words about Count Zinnendorf who is mentioned in the first stanza. He was born in 1700 in Dresden, Saxony (Germany) and died in 1760. He was the son of a Saxon minister and of noble descent. He wanted to study theology but his family wanted him to study law. After he was married, he inherited part of his grandmother’s estate and became interested in his tenants’ religious affairs. Along with these refugees from Bohemia and Moravia, they developed their own Moravian Church in Herrnhut, Saxony. Zinnendorf believed that members should provide each other with living quarters, food, clothing, childcare, education and employment, if possible. This “communitarian” ideal became very popular and the aristocracy became doubtful of their allegiance to the state. Zinnendorf was ordained in the Lutheran church in hopes of appeasing them. Before being banished from the estate, he was consecrated a bishop of the *Unitas Fratrum* in 1773 and then traveled to the Netherlands, Baltics, West Indies, and England establishing congregations in these areas. In 1741, he traveled to America eventually setting up a congregation in the Philadelphia area, namely Bethlehem. Tobias was a member of the Moravian church and so the reference to Count Zinnendorf.

Philadelphia

If you’re off to Philadelphia in the morning,

You mustn’t take my stories for a guide.

There’s little left indeed of the city you will read of,

And all the folk I write about have died. Now few will understand if you mention Talleyrand,

Or remember what his cunning and his skill did.

And the cabmen at the wharf do not know Count Zinnendorf,

Nor the Church in Philadelphia he builded.

It is gone, gone, gone with lost Atlantis (Never say I didn’t give you warning).

In Seventeen Ninety-three ‘twas there for all to see, But it’s not in Philadelphia this morning.

In this first section, Kipling in referring to the stories in *Rewards and Fairies*, writes that there is little left behind of the people who lived in the city in 1793. Not many people would remember who Talleyrand or Zinnendorf was; indeed, I had to look them up! He laments perhaps that the diversity and excitement of the city has changed so much that by the early 1900s, when the poem was written, you might not recognize it – so do not look for it. Also we know that Washington was living in the city during his presidency so the city was filled with visitors, dignitaries, lobbyists, and early activists. The city must of have been bustling at all hours of the day.

If you're off to Philadelphia in the morning,

You mustn't go by anything I've said.

Bob Bicknell's Southern Stages have been laid aside for ages,

But the Limited will take you there instead.

Toby Hirte can't be seen at One Hundred and Eighteen

North Second Street--no matter when you call;

And I fear you'll search in vain for the wash-house down the lane

Where Pharaoh played the fiddle at the ball.

It is gone, gone, gone with Thebes the Golden,

(Never say I didn't give you warning).

In Seventeen Ninety-four 'twas a famous dancing floor--

But it's not in Philadelphia this morning.

In this section of the poem, Kipling again writes that you shouldn't go by anything that has been said. Bob Bicknell's Southern Stages was mentioned in the story. Pharaoh sold horses to Bob for the Baltimore stagecoaches and made quite a profit. The Limited may be referring to The Liberty Limited, which the Pennsylvania Railroad debuted in the 1930s. It was a revolutionary new streamliner, which became a competitor of the B&O Railroad until World War II. Here we see reference to travel in old Philadelphia being replaced by the monstrous trains during Industrial Revolution.

Toby Hirte of course, is Tobias the Apothecary who takes Pharaoh under his wing. Red Jacket brings Pharaoh to him because of his affiliation with the Moravian Church. He was making pills when Pharaoh first met him and selling them as he traveled around the area along with Red Jacket's Seneca Oil. After the Civil War, teaching hospitals such as Hahnemann in Philadelphia trained and licensed physicians, which would have replaced many "Apothecaries."

There are a couple of references to hotels, dancing halls, and taverns in this poem. Pharaoh was a fiddler who was hired to play at various dancing halls in the story. Thebes the Golden must have been one that Pharaoh played in which was well known in 1794.

If you're off to Philadelphia in the morning,

You must telegraph for rooms at some Hotel.

You needn't try your luck at Epply's or "The Buck,"

Though the Father of his Country liked them well.

It is not the slightest use to inquire for Adam Goos,

Or to ask where Pastor Meder has removed--so
You must treat as out of date the story I relate
Of the Church in Philadelphia he loved so.
He is gone, gone, gone with Martin Luther
(Never say I didn't give you warning)
In Seventeen Ninety-five
he was, (rest his soul!) alive.
But he's not in Philadelphia this morning.

In this next section of the poem, Kipling is referring to hotels that were around at the time Washington was staying at the President's House in Philadelphia. Pastor Meder and Adam Goos were Priest and Brother, respectively, of the Moravian church in the story. Pastor Meder is listed in the church records as pastor during the early 1800s.⁵ He is gone with Martin Luther, may be referring back to Count Zinnendorf who was ordained a Lutheran priest to appease the aristocracy of Saxony. In 1795, Pastor Meder may have been alive but not Count Zinnendorf!

If you're off to Philadelphia this morning,
And wish to prove the truth of what I say,
I pledge my word you'll find the pleasant land behind
Unaltered since Red Jacket rode that way.
Still the pine-woods scent the noon;
still the catbird sings his tune;
Still autumn sets the maple-forest blazing;
Still the grape-vine through the dusk flings her soul-compelling musk;
Still the fire-flies in the corn make night amazing!
They are there, there, there with Earth immortal
(Citizens, I give you friendly warning). .
The things that truly last when men and times have passed,
They are all in Pennsylvania this morning!

This is a wonderful ending to the poem, when Kipling turns from people and places you could find in Philadelphia in the 1790s to what is truly lasting and you can still find in Philadelphia – the beautiful nature that can still be seen in and around the city. Although this would have been more true in 1910 than it is today, if you care to look around the city, especially in Fairmount Park, you can find the pine woods, the catbirds, the maple trees turning yellow, orange, and red in autumn and the fire-flies! Kipling even then makes the point that you can see these beautiful things in Pennsylvania, widening the area to incorporate the cornfields and woodlands that can still be found today.

Carl Sandburg

Carl Sandburg was born on January 6, 1878 in Galesburg, Illinois. His parents were from Sweden, his father was an illiterate blacksmith but his mother could read and write and “often amazed us with her English vocabulary.”⁶ Sandburg had various jobs before the age of 19, when he decided to see the world. Since he did not have any money, he learned that he could travel as a hobo, without any money at least until he found a job. He left his family home with \$3.25 in his pocket. What he noticed when he got to Chicago was that although the country was emerging from hard time and prosperity seemed to be on the way, there were still many people out of work. When he returned home, he worked on farms and for a painting company. America in 1898 was at war with Spain over Cuba. After Sandburg learned of the sinking of the battleship Maine, he knew he wanted to enlist. After receiving his uniform and training in the Army, he was sent to Puerto Rico, where he survived a short stay fighting only with mosquitoes and discomfort from the heavy Civil War uniforms and equipment soldiers were given at that time.

After the war, Sandburg enlisted in Lombard College, which is where he came under the influence of Walt Whitman. He loved Whitman’s free verse, unrhymed and easy style and gave him the greatest compliment – that of imitating his style. Sandburg left Lombard before he graduated – it is not clear why he left but judging by his history so far, he did not seem to stay long at any one job or place and later said that he was happy but restless at Lombard. He was married, living in Milwaukee, working as editor for the Social-Democratic Herald where he was finally able to write a page and two columns a week. In the summer of 1912, he and his wife decided to move to Chicago hoping that this would be the place where Sandburg could write poetry.

In 1913, Sandburg wrote and edited for many publishers, including *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*. He wrote the Chicago poems while trying to get a steady job. His wife sent some of his poems to *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, but they had been rejected. Unknowingly, Sandburg decided to stop in the new offices and they loved his poems. They were then published and the rest they say is history!

Chicago

Hog Butcher for the World,

Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,

Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler;

Stormy, husky, brawling,

City of the Big Shoulders:

North Callahan wrote that this poem offended and shocked many readers. They did not like his slang or reference to the common man. The poem begins by listing jobs that require muscle, hard work and grit. "City of the big shoulders" speaks to the hard working nature of the people who helped build the city and keep it going. (I read that it actually was "City of the broad shoulders.")

They tell me you are wicked and I believe them, for I have seen your painted women under the gas lamps luring the farm boys.

And they tell me you are crooked and I answer: Yes, it is true I have seen the gunman kill and go free to kill again.

And they tell me you are brutal and my reply is: On the faces of women and children I have seen the marks of wanton hunger.

And having answered so I turn once more to those who sneer at this my city, and I give them back the sneer and say to them:

Come and show me another city with lifted head singing so proud to be alive and coarse and strong and cunning.

Sandburg acknowledges the brutal but hardworking side of Chicago. During the early 1900s, Chicago was the transportation hub of the country and was also the agricultural, manufacturing and financial center. The city was growing fast – reportedly its population doubled every 20 years. Chicago was and is a large metropolitan area where thousands of people came to look for jobs. Sandburg in his own quest to find a job met many people who, like him, struggled to find work. He also met people who worked hard for a living and still could not put enough food on their family's table at night. Speaking for the city, Sandburg answers those who would criticize, point fingers at, and look down upon people who were just trying to make a good living. His reply speaks to the images that he has seen walking around Chicago – women selling their bodies for money, gunmen killing others, crooked officials, children going hungry – and asks, show me a city that does not have these same conditions and situations, that is proud and strong!

Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on job, here is a tall bold slugger set vivid against the little soft cities;

Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning as a savage pitted against the wilderness,

Bareheaded,

Shoveling,

Wrecking,

Planning,

Building, breaking, rebuilding,

It is like Sandburg is saying - here the magnificent city, carrying big shoulders, set against the little soft cities - as fierce and mighty as a dog - can take those curses from others and fling them amid the toil of piling job on job - they won't distract us (the city) from building, breaking, rebuilding. It can take what you throw at it!

Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with white teeth,

Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young man laughs,

Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has never lost a battle,

Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse, and under his ribs the heart of the people,

Laughing!

Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of Youth, half-naked, sweating, proud to be Hog Butcher, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player with Railroads and Freight Handler to the Nation.

Sandburg seems to be saying - under all the dust and dirt, underneath the nature of things, underneath the skin of workers, there comes that pure satisfaction of a job well done. You see it in young people, young workers who do not yet feel the toll hard work has on the body and soul after years of hard labor. They enjoy the day, the small accomplishments and are proud to be a part of making Chicago the great city it is. Indeed these workers make Chicago the great city it is!

Walt Whitman

Walt Whitman was born on May 31, 1819 in West Hills, Long Island, New York. Because of his father's economic situation, including bad investments and inconsistent jobs, Whitman's formal education ended when he was eleven. At this young age, he took a job at a law office and because they took kindly to him, they helped him improve his handwriting and composition skills and gave him a membership to the library so that he could continue reading. Throughout his lifetime he had many jobs including newspaper editor, teaching, printing, and journalist to name a few. In 1841, he became involved in the Democratic electoral campaign and gave speeches and wrote articles about politics. In 1855, Whitman's famous poem, *Leaves of Grass* was self-published, which some feel he began writing as far back as the 1840s. In this poem, Whitman "celebrated democracy, nature, love, and friendship. This monumental work chanted praises to the body as well as to the soul, and found beauty and reassurance even in death."⁷

After the Civil War broke out in April 1861, Whitman's brother, George, enlisted in the war. Whitman decided to resume his career as a journalist and after reading George's name among those who were wounded at the battle of Fredericksburg, Whitman decided to travel to Washington to search for him. Whitman stayed in Washington and worked as a nurse in the area hospitals. He kept careful notes throughout the war and wrote articles for newspapers. Although he never officially met President Lincoln, he wrote that he saw him many times while in Washington and they would exchange bows. Whitman wrote two poems about Lincoln, one entitled, "O Captain, My Captain" and the other "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" which was written after Lincoln's assassination.

To date I have not found any background information on Whitman's poem, "The Great City" - not even the

date it was written. We know that Whitman lived and worked in New York City and visited many others. He traveled more after the Civil War than before due to family commitments – he helped to care for his siblings including a mentally challenged younger brother. I think it is safe to assume that he was not writing about New York City.

The Great City

The place where a great city stands is not the place of stretch'd wharves, docks, manufactures, deposits of produce merely, Nor the place of ceaseless salutes of new-comers or the anchor-lifters of the departing, Nor the place of the tallest and costliest buildings or shops selling goods from the rest of the earth, Nor the place of the best libraries and schools, nor the place where money is plentiest, Nor the place of the most numerous population.

New York in the 1800s was the great city where immigrants flowed in through Ellis Island, where I can imagine ceaseless salutes to newcomers and anchors lifted aboard ocean liners. It was the place of the tallest buildings, shopping and where money was “plentiest!” And of course, New York City continues to have the largest city population in the United States.

Where the city stands with the brawniest breed of orators and bards, Where the city stands that is belov'd by these, and loves them in return and understands them, Where no monuments exist to heroes but in the common words and deeds, Where thrift is in its place, and prudence is in its place, Where the men and women think lightly of the laws, Where the slave ceases, and the master of slaves ceases, Where the populace rise at once against the never-ending audacity of elected persons, Where fierce men and women pour forth as the sea to the whistle of death pours its sweeping and unript waves,

In this second stanza, Whitman is giving us clues for what he considers the greatest city. It's a city where the strongest breed of storytellers and speakers live, where people love to hear these orators and bards speak and understand their message, where common people are their heroes, where people are careful with their earnings and spend wisely, where men and women respect the law, where slavery does not exist, where the community protects its interests, and where men and women give of themselves for the common good.

Where outside authority enters always after the precedence of inside authority, Where the citizen is always the head and ideal, and President, Mayor, Governor and what not, are agents for pay, Where children are taught to be laws to themselves, and to depend on themselves, Where equanimity is illustrated in affairs, Where speculations on the soul are encouraged, Where women walk in public processions in the streets the same as the men, Where they enter the public assembly and take places the same as the men; Where the city of the faithfulest friends stands, Where the city of the cleanliness of the sexes stands, Where the city of the healthiest fathers stands, Where the city of the best-bodied mothers stands, There the great city stands.

Whitman continues in the third and final paragraph giving us more clues. It's a city where people call the outside authority when they cannot solve their conflicts, where elected officials truly represent the people,

where children are educated to become citizens, where people are encouraged to find out who they are, where women are equal to men, where loyal friends abound, where good health is important for the well being of fathers and mothers because a healthy family is the foundation for a great city. By the end of the poem, you realize that Whitman is listing the elements of an ideal city – a great city. Wouldn't it be amazing to live in such as city?

Strategies

Georgia Heard in *HeartMaps* created a way to engage students in writing poetry, using heart-shaped paper, for students to write about things that are close to their heart. She models her own heart map, which has in the center those people that are closest to her – her family and relatives. In sections around the center, she adds places, things, art, travel spots, and friends that are close to her heart. Students are guided to create their own heart map including things and people that are important to them. Students would then create a poem about themselves. Heard offers ten ideas for making heart maps. I would also use “My Writer’s Heart Map, which offers students a way to write about their favorite authors, books, poems, words, and ideas. They would then write a poem about their favorite writers and books.

Finally, I would use the “Home is Where My Heart Is Heart Map” in which students create a heart map of a place that is special to them, a place that their family lives, a place where they first did something, a place that they visited, a unique and interesting landmark, or an inspiring place in nature. Students would create a poem about their favorite places, which would serve as an introduction to writing poetry about their neighborhood.

Kenneth Koch in *Rose, Where Did You Get That Red?* created a unique way to teach children’s poetry. Instead of teaching types of poems, rhymes, rhythms, and meter, etc., Koch uses “poetry ideas.” Instead of using children’s poetry as examples for his students to imitate, he uses adult poetry. He will take a poem such as “The Tyger” by William Blake and show students that Blake is asking the tiger questions about what makes it such a fearful and awesome creature. Koch then gives students a poetry idea, “Write a poem in which you are talking to a beautiful and mysterious creature and you can ask it anything you want – anything. You have the power to do this because you can speak its secret language.”⁸ I can imagine how excited his students were to get started writing. By using poetry ideas, his students were able to create poems, not by copying the poet’s style, but by taking the poet’s ideas for writing the poem.

In this unit, students will be exposed to poems that will help them to put into words what living in a big city is like. Using Koch’s “poetry ideas,” students will read and analyze poems that will help them to look at their city in different ways. The idea of using poetry ideas will be introduced through Jack Prelutsky’s poems in *Ride a Purple Pelican*. These poems for children use either a city or state in many of the poems. One poem, “Oh Pennington Poe,” is a simple poem about things that are not working, for instance, “your auto won’t go, your truck is so rusty it’s stuck in the snow.”⁹ These things can be found in a city so as a class we could use this poetry idea of things that don’t look well or work right in our city and create a poem. I would use one or two more of the poems in this book, “Grandma Bear from Delaware” and “One Day in Oklahoma” and use these poetry ideas: 1) write about someone you typically see when you are walking in your neighborhood – what are they doing? 2) write about what you hear when you are walking down the street you live on – what do you hear?

Koch has some great poetry ideas that are connected with adult poems. Here are some additional ideas I will use in my classroom: 1) write a poem about something not supposed to be beautiful but which you secretly think is, 2) write a poem about an ideal city – what would it look like? Sound like? Feel like? 3) write a poem inviting people to your city, 4) write a poem asking the city how it got the way it did, and 5) write a poem which looks at the city in 13 different ways.

Once students have been exposed to poetry ideas and public poetry, they will go outside for a neighborhood walk and/or if you have a large playground use this area. Before going out, introduce students to a modified (for elementary school) version of “A Map To the Town” taken from *Poetry of Place: Helping Students Write Their Worlds* (see sample in the Appendix).¹⁰ This exercise will help students to use poetry ideas such as finding opposites, writing about an object that is smaller than a breadbox, choosing a direction and write what you see, and choose a color you are wearing and write about something around you that has the same color. If technology, such as tablets or phones is available, students will be able to take pictures of these images to take back to class. Once they return to the classroom, have students write out their poems and share in small groups or partnerships.

Before I take my students out to see other parts of our city, I would model using a poetry idea from an adult poem by introducing them to Rudyard Kipling’s “Philadelphia,” the first line of which reads, “If you’re off to Philadelphia in the morning, You mustn’t take my stories for a guide.” Using the poetry idea – what stories do you tell about living in Philadelphia today? Ask students to share stories in small groups by creating a mind map. A mind map is a web that is completed in silence in a small group setting. I would have a piece of chart paper for each group and a stack of larger post it notes. The center circle of the web would have Philadelphia Stories with lines extending out from the circle where students would place their post it note. Students would write a short story (paragraph) that they would share with someone living outside Philadelphia and would be typical of Philadelphia (example may be – once we got stuck on the trolley because the track was blocked by a broken down car and we had to find another way home.) Each student would write their stories quietly then place them on the web. Once completed, the students in the group would read each other’s stories, which would become a part of our “Philadelphia” poem. As a class we would make a list of the positive things you can find or do in Philadelphia today. Examples would be Fairmount Park, July 4th fireworks, concerts, picnics in the park and by the river, museums, etc. We would then create a class poem of Philadelphia.

Once students have really looked at how they see Philadelphia and their neighborhood, students will take a school trip to an historic part of Philadelphia. For our class, this will be either in conjunction with History Hunters, a program for teachers and students to visit Historic Germantown including Cliveden where the Battle of Germantown took place, or the Constitutional Walking Tour to visit historic sites such as Independence Hall, the Liberty Bell, Ben Franklin’s homes, etc. They will go with their poetry notebooks and be given time to write about what they see, what they do not see, what they hear and what they feel about this section of the city. Here again, they will be able to use tablets or phones to take pictures of the images that they felt were important. If possible, they will informally interview tourists to ask them of their view of Philadelphia as an outsider to use in writing their own poem. They will use these observations and reflections for their next poems.

In Carl Sandburg’s poem called “Chicago,” he wrote about what Chicago is famous for and contrasts that with how outsiders see the city. He challenges them to find the ideal city and finishes with his experience of Chicago, what he knows to be true – about the hard-working people who scrape out of the city enough not only to survive but also to make them proud of their city. A poetry idea for students would be to write a poem about what Philadelphia is famous for (brotherly love, liberty bell, Benjamin Franklin, etc.) and how they view

Philadelphia from their experience living in the city so far.

Another idea, perhaps for fifth graders, is to look up websites such as “10 Philadelphia Stereotypes That Are Completely Accurate,” written by a man from Detroit, or another website that talks about Philadelphia. You could not show all of this website to fourth graders but it is funny and you can use some of the information, such as: Philadelphians are the most ruthless sports fans in America, Philadelphians have an attitude to them, Philadelphians are obsessed with Rocky, and Cheesesteak-Philadelphians adore it.¹¹ Students could also interview people on our walking tour – tourists from other states and countries -- to get outsiders’ perspectives on the city.

Taking the poetry idea – to write a poem about what Philadelphia is famous for and contrasting that with how they themselves see their city -- students can use the information from their walking tour by circling key words in their journal entries to use for the first stanza or part of their poem. What sticks out for them? Liberty Bell? Independence Hall? Students would then take what they wrote about their neighborhood and use that for the next stanza or part of their poem. The final stanza or part can be their choice – how people who live in their neighborhood feel about living in the city or how students feel about their experience living in the city.

Walt Whitman’s poem, entitled, “The Great City,” will be read aloud, while students read along. After discussing the purpose of the poem and its tone, students will work together in small groups to complete a T-chart on chart paper listing what Philadelphia is on one side and what it is not on the other side. Groups will share out ideas and post lists. The poetry idea is to write about what Philadelphia is not – for example, not the most expensive city to live in, not the easiest to drive around, not the place of the tallest building in America, etc. and what the city is, where the Liberty Bell lives, where the best libraries and museums live, etc. Students will use the posted lists to create a poem of what Philadelphia is and what it is not.

As a final activity, students will create a podcast of one of their poems. Practicing their poem before reciting it will strengthen their speaking skills. They will be able to choose their favorite poem to read aloud. Once all of the students are completed, we will view the podcast as a class, which will strengthen their listening skills. Students will use accountable talk strategies to comment on each other’s poems.

Classroom Activities

Each lesson will be 40 minutes. Refer to the Strategies section for a detailed description of each week, including resources to refer to. Use the writer’s workshop process for lessons: 1) mini-lesson, whole class practice, independent or partnership work/conference, and share out.

Week One

Objective: Student will be able to explain major differences between poems, drama, and prose and refer to the structural elements in order to read and analyze poetry.

Day One – Introduce poetry as a genre. Ask what makes poetry different from prose? Choose poetry to read aloud from Shel Silverstein to engage students. Introduce *Heart Maps* from Georgia Heard to explain that poets write about things that are close to their hearts, that are important to them. Model your completed

heart map Use template on page 25 and have students complete their heart map. Share out and display in class.

Day Two – Introduce imagery. Choose a poem or text from Mentor Texts on page 31 and read aloud to students. Discuss how words help the reader to create mental pictures. Model your writer’s heart map. Using the template on page 28, have students create their writer’s heart map, including things they want to write about in this poetry unit. Share out and display in class.

Day Three – Introduce similes as figurative language. Choose a Shel Silverstein poem to model similes. Identify similes in the poem and create class similes. Model your “Home is where My Heart is” heart map. Using the template on page 68, have students create a “Home is Where My Heart is” heart map. Ask students to write a poem about their heart map. Share out and display.

Day Four – Introduce metaphors as figurative language. Choose another Shel Silverstein poem to model metaphors. Identify metaphors and create class metaphors. Allow students time to finish heart maps and/or share out completed heart map from day three.

Day Five – Introduce the distinction between public and private poetry. Read aloud poems from Jack Prelutsky’s *Ride a Purple Pelican*. Discuss types of public poetry – protest, politics, opinion, war, history, etc. Cut out examples of public and private poems and have students work in small groups of four to determine which poems are public and private. Create a chart of characteristics of public and private poems. Post in classroom.

Week Two

Objective: Students will be able to compare or contrast an event or topic described from two different points of view in order to write poetry about place.

Day One – Introduce “poetry ideas” from Kenneth Koch. Read “Tyger” on page 3 of *Rose, Where Did You Get that Red?* and discuss the poetry idea. “Ask students to write a poem in which you are talking to a beautiful and mysterious creature and you can ask it anything you want. Anything.” Allow time for students to write and conference. Share out poems.

Day Two – Introduce Walking Tour of the Neighborhood. Go over directions for “Map of the Town.” Allow students to take a tablet or phone to take pictures. After completing the tour, allow students time to create a poem from their worksheet. Share out. (If time runs short, students will create a poem on day three.)

Day Three – Introduce mind maps to students. On chart paper, one for each group of four, draw a web. The center of each web is “Neighborhood Memories.” Draw four lines from the center. Give each student a post-it note (larger ones) and ask students to silently write down a memory they have of living in their neighborhood (not a memory of living in their homes). Have them place it on the web. Allow students times to read each vignette and silently write comments or questions they have about the vignette on the chart paper stemming from the vignette. Students can respond to questions or comments by drawing lines from the question or comment and adding and responding in writing. This is all completed without talking. Post the charts on the walls and allow students to take a walk around the classroom looking at each other’s stories.

Day Four – Read aloud “Philadelphia” by Rudyard Kipling. Read each paragraph a second time, discussing the historic and fictional figures in the poem. Discuss the poetry idea, which is write about what Philadelphia has

been known for but you cannot find it today. Remind students of their stories on the mind maps. These stories, events, and characters can be used for the poem. Model writing a first stanza with the class. Ask students to write two more stanzas of the poem.

Day Five – Ask students to share out their stanzas from day four. Reread the last stanza of the poem “Philadelphia” where Kipling wrote about the lasting qualities of nature in Pennsylvania. Discuss why he would have written about Pennsylvania instead of Philadelphia in the last stanza. Discuss and create a list of things in nature you can still find in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania. Ask students to write their last paragraph of their poem about Philadelphia. Share out poems. Make comparisons of students’ poems with Kipling’s “Philadelphia.”

Week Three

Objective: Students will be able to compare or contrast an event or topic described from two different points of view in order to write poetry about place.

Day One – Students will be participating in a walking tour of Philadelphia on day two. Discuss with students expectations for behavior and the objectives for the tour. Describe what they will see and what they are expected to do, which is to observe and record what they notice about the places they are visiting. Ask students to write in their poetry notebooks (which they will bring with them) questions about the sites they are visiting. Share out.

Day Two – Walking tour of Historic Philadelphia. Students will bring their notebooks, tablets, and/or phones to record observations and write questions or wonderings. If time, allow students to write a reflection about the tour when they return to class (this could be a homework assignment).

Day Three – Read aloud “Chicago” by Carl Sandburg. Ask students to reread aloud. Discuss the poetry idea: write about what Philadelphia is famous for and how students see the city. Create a T-chart about what Philadelphia is famous for, which should be easy to do after the class trip, and record how students feel about the city. Compare and contrast these items, discussing why perceptions of the city are different from what it is famous for.

Day Four – Preview and show www.movoto.com/guide/philadelphia-pa/philadelphia-stereotypes/, which is a fun way to see how outsiders feel and think about Philadelphians. Choose three or four items and discuss with students. Reread “Chicago” and ask students to discuss how outsiders saw Chicago and how the poet felt about the city. Ask students to write two or three stanzas about how they feel about Philadelphia. Share out.

Day Five – Model the first two stanzas of your poem on Kipling’s “Philadelphia.” Discuss your thoughts about what the city is known for and how you view the city. Ask students to write their last stanza on how they feel to be a Philadelphian. Share out.

Week Four

Objective: Students will be able to engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions on grade level topics and texts, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly in order to write and discuss public poems. Day One – Read aloud “The Great City” by Walt Whitman. Give background of Whitman (where he lived) and ask students what city he might have been writing about. Ask students to reread in partnerships and circle words or phrases that they are unsure of. Discuss these words or phrases as a whole class. Assign

portions of the poem to small groups of three or four and ask students to identify a poetry idea. Ask students to share out their ideas. Take all ideas and chart on paper. Whittle poetry ideas down to one or two and ask students to identify where in the poem they can find the poetry ideas recorded on the chart. Discuss. Day Two – Review poetry idea created on day one. Reread “The Great City” and ask students to think about how a poem could be written about Philadelphia using the agreed upon poetry idea. In small groups, ask students to create a T-chart showing what Philadelphia is known for and what it is not known for (example: we are known for our cheesesteaks but are not known for our volunteerism). Share out T-charts. Day Three – Review T-charts from day two. Begin a class poem using Whitman’s idea – what a great city should be known for. Ask students to write a poem about Philadelphia using the class model or creating their own poem. Share out and discuss poems. Day Four – Continue sharing and discussing poems. Inform students that they will be creating a podcast of their poems. Allow students to partner and practice reading their poems. Begin recording once a pair of students is ready. Day Five – Continue recording students. Once everyone has read his or her poems, view podcast. Ask students to write a reflection of their experience writing poetry. Share out by using Google Classroom, which will allow students to share their reflections on the unit and start a dialogue about poetry.

Extension idea – create a poem using Kipling’s poetry idea – instead of what you used to be able to find in Philadelphia versus what you find today, change it to what you find in Philadelphia today and what you hope to find in the future – maybe 50 years from now.

Common Core State Standards for Pennsylvania

CC.1.3.4.E

Explain major differences between poems, drama, and prose and refer to the structural elements of each when writing or speaking about a text.

CC.1.3.4.D

Compare and contrast an event or topic told from two different points of view.

CC.1.2.4.F

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in grade level text, including figurative language.

CC.1.5.4.A

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions on grade level topics and texts, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

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Hermesen, Terry. *Poetry of place: helping students write their worlds*. Urbana, IL:

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This book has great poetry writing activities that can be modified for students of

all ages. The author invites readers to modify as needed.

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www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/walt-whitman#tab-poems. This page includes a short biography of Walt Whitman and selected poems.

Appendix

Worksheet for "A Map of the Town" adapted from Terry Hermsen's *Poetry of Place*

Name _____ Date _____

A MAP TO THE TOWN (A POETRY GAME)

A Way to Make a Poem Without Trying to Make a Poem

Directions: For each spot, do what the directions say, and then write two lines or so as if they were part of a poem you were making.

1. Start somewhere no one else is (where you are far from another student).

- Jot down ten nouns from your what you see – each with a strong beginning sound such as B, D, G, K, P, or T.
- Then write two strong lines of poetry using two of those words in each line.

2. Cross the school yard and find a new place to sit. Jot down four unusual pairs of opposites. For example, window-sky, steps-gutters. Write two lines using those opposites. For example, "The steps are high and cracked, difficult for little kids to climb. The gutters allow the rain from the roof to flow to the ground."

3. From the same spot or find a place no more than 10 steps away, find something small around you – smaller than a breadbox or smaller than your hand. Look at it for at least five minutes noticing little things about it. Write two or four “impossible questions” about it – thinking of it as if it were human or had a point of view and feelings of its own. For example, if the object was a traffic sign that was painted over, “How did it feel to be covered by spray paint? Do you wonder what would happen to you if you were struck by lightning?”

4. Walk to another spot in the schoolyard. Stop and look around. Think of a number in your head from 1 to 6. Look in the direction the number below gives you:

1 = up 2 = down 3 = in front of you 4 = behind you

5 = to the right 6 = to the left

Take something you see and write two lines that begin,

“Everybody knows . . .”

5. Walk somewhere zigzag from where you are. Stop and look around. Find something around you that is the same color as something you have on. Using that color (and/or that thing) as a starting place, write two lines that begin, “I never...” or, “I once...”

6. Write two lines that are a “creative lie.” For example, “The cats get together each night on the blue porch and dance.”

7. Without turning your head, from the side of your eye, find a source of light. Look at it, or walk closely up to it. Write two to four lines that begin, “The light is like...” or “The light is...”

Using your poetry notebook, create a poem about your neighborhood. You can add or subtract lines or words as needed.

Endnotes

1. Hermsen, Terry. *Poetry of Place: Helping Students Write Their Worlds*. 156
2. Heard, Georgia. *Awakening the Heart*. xvii.
3. Thurston, Michael. *American Political Poetry Between the World Wars*. 17
4. Rich, Adrienne, *What is Found There*, 39
5. www.books.google.com/books?id=3DRHAAAIAAJ&pg=PA279&lpg=PA279&dq=pastor+meder+moravian+church&source=bl&ots=cmjWvEHWO
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9. Prelutsky, Jack, *Ride a Purple Pelican*, 28
10. Hermsen, Terry. *Poetry of Place: Helping Students Write Their Worlds*. 156-157
11. www.movoto.com/guide/philadelphia-pa/philadelphia-stereotypes/

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