Playing with poetry: Lessons utilizing creative drama techniques to teach poetry to senior high school students

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Playing with poetry: Lessons utilizing creative drama techniques to teach poetry to senior high school students

Lawton, John Brooks, III, M.A.
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1990

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PLAYING WITH POETRY: LESSONS
UTILIZING CREATIVE DRAMA
TECHNIQUES TO TEACH
POETRY TO SENIOR
HIGH SCHOOL
STUDENTS

by
John Brooks Lawton III

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Theatre Arts

Department of Theatre Arts
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
July, 1990
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University of Nevada, Las Vegas
July, 1990
Abstract

Although much has been written on the ways drama can be used in the English classroom, little has focused on the teaching of poetry using dramatic techniques. This paper provides a thirty-lesson creative drama unit for teaching poetry to high school students. The first three chapters introduce creative drama, review current research, and detail the background of the lessons. The bulk of the paper is contained in the fourth chapter, the lessons themselves. The early lessons introduce students to improvisation, poetry writing, spontaneity, and in-class performance. These skills are refined and used in later lessons to teach areas of poetry, including sound devices and poetic meter and structure. Specific poems are provided for each lesson. In the final lessons the students use their own knowledge and their ability to perform create original dramatic presentations based upon poetry they themselves have chosen.
Acknowledgements

This is dedicated to the three fine members of my evaluating committee at Punahou, without whom none of this would have been necessary.
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Introduction

It has long been recognized that drama can be used effectively in the classroom. Geraldine Brain Sik, a leading advocate of drama in education, argues that drama has two functions in education:

The ultimate purpose of drama in education is to open children's minds, stimulate their imaginations and language abilities, and spark their enthusiasm for continued personal development and discovery. In other words, drama should help the child learn about himself or herself and the world around and grow accordingly.

Drama can also serve a related purpose as a teaching tool. It may be used to help children explore factual knowledge and concepts in other subject areas and "try on" social experiences they are likely to encounter in real life. (9-10)

This paper addresses both purposes of drama. It uses drama as a tool with which to teach poetry; drama and poetry both facilitate the self-discovery that is Sik's first purpose. In addition, the goal of these lessons is to set up a learning environment in which students become involved both physically and creatively in poetry. Using drama, the students literally bring poems to life and, with those poems, give voice to their feelings and ideas.

The impetus for these lessons came while teaching 9th and 10th grade English at the Punahou School in Honolulu, Hawaii. Through the discovery of Ken Byron's book Drama in the English Classroom, my resolve to use these techniques began. Efforts to teach poetry using drama consisted primarily of having students "perform" poems. Small groups of three or four students would stage a reading of a poem, to prompt class discussion. Little effort was made, however, to teach specific drama techniques for use
in their classroom performances.

All of the classes were one semester long; consequently there was relatively little time to use drama with the same group of students. Nevertheless, the effort proved extremely successful. Students not only became more willing to participate in class discussions of poetry, but their comments were more substantive and specific. They seemed to have a better appreciation of the creative effort involved in writing poetry than they did before. Drama proved to be an effective component of my classes. From that beginning this paper evolved: A set of lessons using drama techniques to teach poetry to high school students.
Review of Creative Drama Techniques
Related to the Teaching of Poetry

The methodology used in planning lessons utilizing creative drama techniques to teach poetry is based on a variety of research. Nellie McCaslin's *Creative Drama in the Classroom* is a source of information on the history of drama in education. Ken Byron's *Drama in the English Classroom* and Cecily O'Neill and Alan Lambert's *Drama Structures* provide examples of English curricula that rely heavily on drama, and Marilyn McCaffrey's dissertation "The Development of an Oral Dramatic Approach for the Teaching of Poetry in Senior High School" focuses specifically on teaching poetry using drama.

Helane Rosenberg's Rutgers Imagination System, described in her text *Creative Drama and Imagination* gives an analysis of creativity and imagination, and presents a drama system designed to cultivate those skills. Leading researchers in creative drama are Dorothy Heathcote, Brian Way, and Geraldine Brain Siks. Finally, two preeminent teachers and researchers of improvisational techniques are Viola Spolin and Keith Johnstone.

The need for an overview of the state of creative drama and drama in education today is served by McCaslin's *Creative Drama in the Classroom*. Intended as a textbook and handbook for the beginning teacher, the book not only provides methods of using drama, but also has features chapters on related studies, such as the circus arts, theatre for the handicapped, and puppetry. The chapter most related to the lessons in this paper, however, is "The Possibilities of Poetry." McCaslin opens the chapter by saying:

"Children like poetry....The music and language, as well as the ideas, feelings, and images of poetry, reach the younger child particularly,
capturing and stimulating his or her imagination. For this reason, poetry can be used in creative dramatics, often with highly successful results.

Many leaders find poetry a more satisfactory springboard than prose for introducing creative playing to a group. (230)

Many researchers in creative drama find poetry a springboard into drama; very few utilize drama as a springboard into the study of poetry. Ken Byron's *Drama in the English Classroom* and Cecily O'Neill and Alan Lambert's *Drama Structures*, two of the most practical publications providing drama curricula for other classes, deal exclusively with prose. Ken Byron regrets it as an inevitable omission: "In a book of this length it is impossible to deal adequately with all the connections between English and drama....There is, for example, nothing about...poetry in the pages that follow" (5). A search through materials, texts and educational journals on the methodology of teaching poetry reveals only lessons such as Feinberg's "Poetry Theater: Integrating Poetry and Drama," using drama to teach a facet of poetry, or accounts such as Dunning's "Scripting: A Way of Talking," reporting success with students performing poetry in some fashion.

The only significantly comprehensive research on teaching poetry with drama techniques is the doctoral dissertation of Marilyn McCaffrey, "The Development of an Oral Dramatic Approach for the Teaching of Poetry in Senior High School." McCaffrey's Oral-Dramatic Approach stimulates student appreciation of poetry primarily through vocalization and dramatization. The goal of the lessons is to develop the students' aesthetic sense of poetry; once that is accomplished, McCaffrey maintains, the class can progress to discussions about the specific poems read. The Oral-Dramatic Approach "is an initial phase in a progressive sequence of literature study" (McCaffrey 2). The teacher is expected to build on this appreciation of poetry and refine "these personal responses through close reading of the text" (McCaffrey 2).
Rather than develop a student's aesthetic abilities, the Rutgers Imagination Method (RIM), advocated by Helane Rosenberg in *Creative Drama and Imagination* develops a student's ability to imagine and to manipulate those images. Lessons provide the opportunity to exercise and expand those abilities until the student stands ready to apply his or her creativity to an original drama work. A study of this system illuminates the range of theatrical skills available to the teacher, including set design, costuming, and dramatic criticism. Researchers in creative drama often ignore these disciplines, and place primary emphasis on performing and directing. In addition, the highly structured nature of RIM offers a useful model for a graduated and developmental set of drama lessons. RIM is composed of three steps: Starters, Transformations, and Mastery.

Starters are introductory exercises that focus on specific drama behaviors and imagery skills. Those behaviors and skills are divided into seven categories: Introduction/Transitions; Object/Prop; Movement/Pantomime; Sound/Speech; Person/Character; Sequence/Story; and Design/Environment (Rosenberg 115). Once students have facility and fluency with each category, the class moves on to Transformations, exercises that combine skills and call for greater critical judgment. There are five categories of Transformations: Self as Character, Events/Stories into Plots, Place Becomes Setting, Adding Conflict, and Creating Spectacle (Rosenberg 118-119). Transformations also teach students theatrical conventions and principles of dramatic structure.

The final stage of RIM, Mastery, is deliberately open-ended. Participants use their own knowledge and experience to create a unique personal drama. This stage becomes especially useful, since the culmination of the developed poetry lessons is a drama project unique to each student. These lessons do not concentrate on the same skills as the RIM Starters and Transformations, but I have emulated the progression the RIM lessons make from introductory exercises which emphasize a single skill and in which the teacher
controls the direction of the lesson, to exercises utilizing combinations of skills directed primarily by the students themselves.

 Besides RIM, the primary inspiration for the culminating lessons comes from the work of Dorothy Heathcote. A British educator and leading contributor to the field of creative drama, Heathcote advocates opening students up to the "universal." By imposing rituals, slowing the pace, or stopping the class for reflection, Heathcote always tries to increase the depth of insight about the experience. This, she argues, is the reason we pursue drama. As Betty Jane Wagner explains in her book *Dorothy Heathcote: Drama as a Learning Medium:*

> The universal is the wellspring, the source of human understanding. Instead of starting with this source, however, drama, like all art, starts with a very carefully selected, precise and particular, unrepeatable instance—one that then acquires significance as it reverberates in the chambers of the universal. For most classes, the teacher needs to sensitize students to feeling this resonance, which takes them not out of themselves, but rather more fully into themselves, and into the experiences of the real world as well as those of the drama. In our real lives we seldom stop for this kind of pondering; in drama [the teacher] deliberately makes time for it. Such reflection is the only thing that makes drama worth the doing. If you cannot increase reflective power in people, you might as well not teach, because reflection is the only thing that in the long run changes anybody. (76-77)

Heathcote's means of achieving reflection is through a system emphasizing role-playing, and in which the teacher takes a very active part. Unlike RIM, where the teacher directs specific lessons, Heathcote's method trains the teacher as a medium, evoking the drama from the students and letting them make as many of the decisions about the drama as possible. Although the teacher may have goals in mind for the drama, the means to achieve those goals are almost always left for the students to decide. The challenge of
this system is that the leader must be prepared to improvise as much as (perhaps more than) the students, since he or she does not go into a class knowing exactly where the drama will go.

A teacher leading creative drama using Dorothy Heathcote's methods does not improvise classes blindly, however. While she believes in throwing students into drama and letting them sink or swim, Heathcote is very structured in training the drama leader. The bulk of Dorothy Heathcote: Drama as a Learning Medium, the best codification of Heathcote's method, is devoted to techniques that the teacher must master. Of these, I find two to be especially helpful with the poetry lessons because they can be used by any teacher, even one not explicitly following Heathcote's method. These techniques are "teaching in registers," and the use of the "Brotherhood Code."

Teaching in registers refers to the attitudes a teacher can employ in putting himself or herself at the service of the class. Instead of always being an authority figure, the "one-who-knows" register, a teacher may find it more useful to play a different role with the class. These can include the "I-have-no-idea" register, the "interested-listener" register, or the "devil's-advocate" register (Wagner 37-39) The detail with which Heathcote explains the use of, and techniques behind, each register, are especially useful to both a beginning teacher and a planner of lessons involving role-playing. Of additional interest is the chapter Heathcote devotes to leading with questions; since these classes are designed for students who have little or no experience with drama, it is important to know how to guide them through an exercise without appearing judgmental and without stifling creativity. Heathcote addresses these problems specifically, explaining how registers and role-playing can turn a teacher's questions into challenges the students are eager to accept.

The "Brotherhood Code" is intended as a simple way to find material for drama. Focusing on a single element of a situation, the teacher looks for other situations across
time and social strata that are, in some way, analogous. Wagner provides an example:

...if [Dorothy Heathcote, playing a role] is carrying in her daughter's breakfast, she says to herself, "I am in the brotherhood of all those who serve another's need," and immediately she has dozens of image at her fingertips—from a waitress at a drive-in to the servant of the king. (48)

Although the lessons included in this paper do not involve this kind of role-playing as much, the "Brotherhood Code" is a helpful idea to develop with students. It encourages and develops spontaneity, and is easily applied to poetry. By finding that "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is a companion to all poems with self-doubting speakers, a student struggling to find a context for Eliot's poetry can make a connection with a poem that might otherwise be unapproachable for him or her. That is the lateral thinking on which the later lessons focus, in particular.

Related to Heathcote's "brotherhood" concept is Geraldine Brain Sik's analysis of the interrelationship of player, playmaker, and audience. According to her, these are the three roles any participant in drama has to play. Not coincidentally, they are also the roles students play in classroom drama work. For students to be able to learn through drama, they need to be able to play these roles which contain the essential elements of any drama. In Drama with Children, Sik describes the "process-concept approach" that clarifies this idea:

The term "process-concept structure" refers to the conceptual framework on which a drama program is based....and provides a guide for designing drama activities and involving children in the dramatic process....The concepts of the framework are based on drama principles that are fundamental to learning the skills of the related roles of player, playmaker, and audience. (3-4)

The basic elements of the Player's role are those skills needed for a creative
performer: relaxation, trust, and concentration; body movement; awareness and use of the five senses; imagination; language, voice, and speech; and characterization. The role of Playmaker is akin to an editor or director and is based in a larger awareness of drama. The elements that comprise that role include plot; character; theme; dialogue; melody-sound; and spectacle. The role of the Audience requires active involvement in the drama; perception, response, and evaluation are the critical elements here (Siks 35).

Unlike Heathcote, Siks does not focus on a specific method teachers can use to teach students drama. Instead, she sees the teacher's task is to guide the students through each of the learning roles, building up and improving each of the separate elements. Simultaneously, the teacher should be guiding students through an exploration of the processes common to all three roles: perceiving; responding; imagining; creating and forming; communicating; and evaluating (Siks 36).

While not specifically using Siks' process-concept structure in the lessons, I find her analysis of the different roles involved in drama enlightening. The drama "experience can only succeed for a child when the child has acquired some basic drama skills and has learned how to use the dramatic process with confidence and understanding" (Siks 36). With an understanding of the three roles the drama skills and the dramatic process will serve, these lessons have been designed to build the student's confidence and understanding.

Poetry, by its very nature, is a very musical art. Brian Way's method, as outlined in Development through Drama, utilizes music and rhythm constantly. A tambourine or drum often serves a control function in Way's classes; the sound of the instrument can dictate the tempo of the exercise, "freeze" the action, or signal a change of movement. Way pays special attention to the sounds and music of speech, and provides an awareness that is invaluable to a teacher looking for ways to integrate drama with the
study of poetic meter, rhythm, and sound devices:

The use of sound is connected not only with movement, not only with the stimulation of ideas for stories and character, not only with mood and atmosphere, not only with teacher control leading to individual personal control by each pupil, it is also concerned with, indeed deeply interwoven with speech. Speech roughly divides into the long sounds of vowels and the short sounds of consonants, and by the use of the long sounds of the cymbal or gong and the short sounds of the drum or tambour, we are providing, at an intuitive level, physical experience of factors deeply concerned with speech experience. (88)

Way also demonstrates the parallels between music and drama. Part of the pleasure we find in sound, he argues, is derived from its three basic ingredients, each easily applicable to drama: time-beat, rhythm and climax (86). These ingredients are so basic to everyone that sound and music can be used as triggers for spontaneous creativity and improvisation. Many of his improvisational exercises, in fact, begin with a sound or a piece of recorded music.

The encouragement and training of students' spontaneity is a critical element of teaching, especially teaching with drama as its focus. Not only does it make the students' dramatic performances more immediate and interesting, but it is the same skill necessary for good writing, both creative and analytical. Two sources are especially practical in understanding and developing lessons encouraging spontaneity. Both have strong theoretical bases, but are founded on actual classroom and acting workshop experience. The fact that their work has been tested already makes them especially useful for a teacher preparing to face flesh and blood students, rather than hypothetical constructs. The first source, Viola Spolin's *Improvisation for the Theater*, provides a framework for getting students up on their feet, improvising. The second, Keith Johnstone's improvisational guide *Impro*, offers ways to unlock creative potential spontaneously.
Viola Spolin, a preeminent figure in the field of improvisational drama, maintains that anyone can improvise and learn if an environment is established "in which the intuitive can emerge and experiencing take place: then teacher and student can embark together upon an inspiring, creative experience" (4). This environment is created using games. The terminology Spolin uses reflects this; creative drama lessons are called "workshops," participants are "players." The workshop games all involve problem-solving of one kind or another, making the task more immediate, and forcing the players to experience what is happening in the here-and-now.

The focus on game playing also makes it easier for the players to lose their inhibitions and self-consciousness as they concentrate on the goal. This is valuable because many students have never done drama before, and those who have, probably did it in the "safe" confines of a theatre class. They know what an English class is supposed to be like, and find it difficult to abandon their preconceptions and get out from behind the desk in front of everyone else. The nature of Spolin's games makes that abandonment easier, since each deals with an immediate task, requiring players to do and see, rather than imagine or feel.

The essential elements to every Spolin theatre game are Point of Concentration, Side-Coaching, and Evaluation. Point of Concentration, also known as focus, provides the control and artistic discipline needed for improvisation, frees "the student for spontaneous action and provides the vehicle for an organic rather than a cerebral experience. It makes perceiving rather than preconception possible and acts as a springboard into the intuitive" (22). Side Coaching is a technique somewhat related to Dorothy Heathcote's teaching in register. As a Side Coach, the teacher or leader is given a new relationship with the student, that of a guide. The teacher calls out statements or questions that help hold players to the goal of each game, and provides another set of
eyes and ears.

The last essential element, Evaluation, is especially important in the classroom setting. Evaluation is deliberately non-judgmental and takes place after each individual team has completed a game. The evaluation is designed so that teacher/director, players, and audience members can objectively comment on the previous game-playing with the goal of improving future work.

Spolin's games, outlined in Improvisation for the Theater and Theater Game File are very specific and structured in an overall framework from the basic exercises to develop focus, to complicated problems of spontaneity and character development. Although none of the lessons specifically address poetry, the clarity of Spolin's system makes it easily adaptable to create lessons where the study of poetry becomes a game. Like Spolin's games, each of the lessons presented here is short and focused or divided into clear sections that are themselves short and focused. In addition, these lessons follow the recipe-like format of Spolin's games.

Viola Spolin and Keith Johnstone both strive to foster the creativity that is the root of improvisation. While Spolin taps a student's creativity through his or her focus and commitment to a task, Johnstone distracts a student into being creative. He argues that everyone is inherently creative; those who seem unable are trying too hard with their conscious mind to find the "correct" or "best" response, instead of allowing their subconscious mind to be truly creative. Johnstone always emphasizes spontaneity. Students are called upon to spontaneously utilize their first response to a question or problem; teachers help this effort by keeping the student endlessly off-balance in acting and narrative exercises. Varied questions, for example, delivered quickly and requiring great varieties of responses force students to accept their initial response to stimuli, rather than consciously making a choice. Johnstone intends this to help the actor improvise drama. It does, and some of his improvisation games are good warmups or exercises in
the classroom, especially since most students have had little experience. But the ability
of a person to accept and work with his or her immediate response is a valuable one to
inculcate in students, particularly when dealing with poetry. Too few students trust their
own initial reactions, and accept another person's response instead. Johnstone's
approach also provides good training for the teacher, since it demands mental agility and
resourcefulness.

A part of Johnstone's *Impro* that is directly applicable to the poetry teacher is his
chapter on "Narrative Skills." In it he describes a variety of games that spur the
spontaneous creation of stories and poems. "Word at a Time," for example, calls for the
player to keep throwing out words, creating sentences without any awareness of the
sentence itself (Johnstone 130-132). Johnstone's game "Verbal Chase" has been
incorporated wholesale into these lessons; others lessons, including *Word
Association* and *Title Games*, are adapted from Johnstone.
Background and Methodology
of Drama Lessons

The following poetry lessons are built on my experiences at Punahou and my research into creative drama techniques. The cornerstone of the lessons, the three Collage Poem exercises adapted from Feinberg's "Poetry Theater," was tested at Punahou as a complete drama unit. In the context of these lessons, however, students are better prepared for the demands of the assignment. The first lessons familiarize the students with performing and utilizing drama, and encourage creativity and spontaneity. The in-class performances these lessons engender also break down students' reservations against performing before their peers in the classroom. Since few classes in a student's academic career ever require him or her to physically or dramatically deal with the subject matter, the student's initial reservations are invariably there, and need to be addressed. Students must become comfortable with drama, as active players and improvisers of their own ideas, if drama is to be used as a learning tool.

The necessity of introductory lessons was proven for me both at Punahou and during a one-week unit on drama to a 10th grade English class at Bonanza High School. In all classes it was evident that those students who had little experience with dramatic performance tended to look at lessons using drama as frivolous, time-wasting, or threatening. Once students gained experience and confidence with drama and creative performance, however, those skills were used with good success as tools to teach poetic vocabulary and critical appreciation of poetry.

The first lessons do not focus on poetry analytically; rather, students write creatively and perform dramatically. The poems that are read propel improvisations and provide models for original poetry. The class discussions, when they do concern poems,
emphasize the students’ reactions to the poetry more than the poetry itself. Lessons like Poem Prologues and Poetry TV familiarize students with poetry and with drama. Writing an original poem in response to an existing model, or planning a presentation of an existing poem requires students to use or respond to poems in a personal way and validates each student's personal reaction. That validation is built upon in subsequent lessons as students perform and use drama even more.

The next group of lessons encourage students to evaluate and build upon their responses to poetry. Choral Reading challenges the student to begin evaluating his or her creative and dramatic choices within the framework of a specific poem. Spell-Making and Tongue Twisters teach specific poetic vocabulary, heightening the students' critical capacity. Lessons like Perambulating Poems and I am the Poem personalize the students' evaluative skills and require him or her to examine the poetic texts more closely in search of substantiating evidence.

The students' powers of synthesis and perception are sharpened in the next set of lessons as they explore the structural underpinnings of poetry. Improvising and role-playing through Title Games and Famous Photographers, students discover the significance of labels and titles which they apply as detectives to The Case of the Beheaded Poems. Visually artistry and creativity are utilized in the Seurat Painting/Seurat Poem and related exercises, requiring students to focus on the individual lines of poems. Movement and sound do the teaching in lessons such as Marching Meter; students learn the intricacies of rhythm and poetic meter by physicalizing the beats of poems.

The final four lessons take the three separate elements taught and developed in the earlier lessons: a critical vocabulary and knowledge of poetry, individual creativity and spontaneity, and each student's confidence in his or her dramatic ability, and apply them in two different ways. The Collage Poem lessons teach a "horizontal" approach to
poetry, in which students work with a wide variety of poems and gain a broader appreciation of the genre; Final Project teaches a "vertical" approach, focusing the students' skills towards a single poem.

In many ways the culminating lessons are comparable to the Mastery phase of the Rutgers Imagination System described by Helane Rosenberg. Like Mastery, these final lessons demand integrated group work that is focused through the students' own individuality, creativity, interests and skills. Also like Mastery dramas, the projects that come out of these lessons are highly unique because of the greater involvement of the students. In these lessons it is they who pick the poems to analyze and use, rather than the teacher, as in the case with most of the earlier lessons.

In a classroom utilizing drama, with all of the spontaneity and improvisation that entails, it is especially important to maintain some kind of routine. Routine provides a comfortable structure for the student unused to drama; it allows the teacher a measure of control; and it gives a sense of closure to the end of each class period. It is intended that the daily routine of any poetry class using these drama lessons will consist of two parts.

First, each class begins with the mental stimulation of the Idiosyncrasy Notebook and the physical activity of a warmup exercise. Warmups are not included in the following lessons, however, because far more complete sources of warmups already exist. In particular, Way's Development through Drama, and Spolin's Improvisation for the Theater each contain a wide range of warmup and introductory exercises. The opening exercises both Way and Spolin use to increase students' awareness of their environment are especially useful for the lessons included in this paper (Way 10-27, Spolin 49-88).

The second part of each class routine is an evaluative period at the end. Many of the lessons specify questions for the class as a whole to consider. Regardless of whether
questions are provided in the lessons, the final five minutes of class should be allotted for a reflective discussion of the period’s activities. The instructor has an opportunity to gauge how far the class has come that day; the student has a chance to evaluate his or her work, change mental gears, and prepare for the next class.
Lesson 1: Idiosyncrasy Notebook

*Purpose:* To start each day with mental gymnastics, encouraging spontaneity and creativity.

*Preparatory Lesson:* None.

*Time Required:* First two minutes of each class period.

*Equipment Required:* A notebook for each student.

*Objective:* The student will free-write for a full and uninterrupted two minutes.

*Description:* Instruct the students to keep a special idiosyncrasy notebook in which they will write non-stop for the first two minutes of every class. Encourage them to explore different kinds of writing materials: pens, felt-tips, crayons, chalk, etc.

Every day a thought-provoking phrase or picture, called a "trigger," will be provided to the students as a springboard for their writing in the idiosyncrasy notebooks. They will spontaneously write whatever comes into their heads in response to the trigger. The specific content of what they write is not as important as the process of writing itself. (Hurst-Hoffman)

*Notes:* Triggers should be as varied and "off-the-wall" as possible. Occasionally they will relate somehow to the day's lesson; other days the trigger will be an apparently random phrase unrelated to any lessons. Keep the students off-balance with the triggers. Do not allow the students to figure out what the trigger will be; their writing in response to the trigger needs to be spontaneous and without forethought. Think of triggers that will inspire a variety of sensory reactions. A list of sample triggers follows:
Sample Idiosyncrasy Notebook Triggers:

"A bee in a cereal box"
"BOOOOOONNGG!!"
"The fog came down and..."
"Cleaning out a fish tank"
"Draw a picture of yourself"
"The Summer Madness Continues"
"Men in orange carts"
"Draw the past, present, and future"
"New lyrics to 'Happy Birthday'"
"Step Right Up"
"Scary first lines on a date"
"Re-invent the teaspoon"
"Innovations for the 90's"
"Unfinished Paisley"
"Horrible haircut"
"Sneeze responses"
"Crime and Punishment--The Musical"
"Holiday Stuff"

"Well, we have to have someplace to put our popsicles!"

"Buzz Shriek Honk Bang Bang Boom!"

"I was sitting in a deserted cafe when, lo and behold, in walks..."

"The magic button gives you three..."
Lesson 2: Modeling Poetry

Purpose: To have students begin writing poetry.

Preparatory Lesson: None.

Time Required: Anywhere from 15 minutes to the entire class period, depending upon the number of poems modeled.

Equipment Required: Although not strictly necessary, it would be useful to have the model examples written on an easel or overhead projector so they are easily visible.

Objective: The student write an original sentence and several original poems based upon provided models.

Description: Present students with the following sentence written on an easel or projected onto a screen: "I returned to the sea of necessity, because it would support a boat; and although I knew little of boats, I could not get them out of my thoughts" (White 206). Read it out loud and explain that it is an interesting model sentence, striking and well-written. Have the students write their own version of the sentence, changing as much, or as little as they want. The point is not to write a sentence that means the same as the model, but to use the model sentence's structure for a new sentence. Reassure them that no one else has to read their work if they do not want. Allow at least 5 minutes for writing. When the sentences are finished, let students share sentences with the rest of the class if they wish.

Continue the modeling exercise with the short poems printed below. For each poem modeled, read it out loud, and let students write their versions of it. Before modeling the next poem, have students share their poems, either with the entire class or in small groups. (Foster)

Notes: For all the writing, if any students get done quickly, have them write some more, trying to imitate the model differently this time. For the model poems, any poem
that is short and striking can be a good model, although it is worth using at least one poem by a child so that students realize that anyone can write poetry. The last three sample poems, for example, were all written when the poet was in the 7th grade.

When students are sharing their poem with the class, keep the discussion of the poems non-judgmental. These may be the first poems some of the students have written. Focus the discussion on particularly effective imagery or phrases. Ask students what they remember most clearly from a poem; what made them remember it so clearly?

For a record of the students' work, collect their best poems and copy them together in a class anthology of poetry. Seeing their work printed in such a fashion encourages students to take pride in their writing.
Sample poems:

"Today I Was So Happy, So I Made This Poem"

As the plump squirrel scampers
Across the roof of the corncrib,
The moon suddenly stands up in the darkness,
And I see that it is impossible to die.
Each moment of time is a mountain.
An eagle rejoices in the oak tree of heaven,
Crying
This is what I wanted.
--James Wright (168)

"Ruler of One"

Reeling in the bait.
Depressed
Not one bite.
Slowly
neeeeee
like the sound of
thunder
the fish makes a run
snap
free
for that moment
ruler of something.
Exuberant.
rejuvenated
hope.
--Ricky Kakazu (Tsujimoto 83)
"Memory Mouse"

I still remember your small white teeth
I still have the scars
I still dream about that white fur
I wonder if I should have skinned you
Your fur would make a nice wall hanging
Your claws that were so agile, once clicking and running
about my room. I wish I could still hang you
by the tail, your whiskers twitching in pain
If only you were still here, so I could poke
you with chopsticks, through the bars of your
cage.

--Austin Sloat (Tsujimoto 71)

"Lion Tamer"

In a cage
he cracks the
floor with his whip.
Backing off huge
ferocious lions.

At 5 o'clock
he rushes home beat and weary.

He finds his impatient wife waiting.
She taunts him like a school teacher
about his tardiness.
He grabs a stool
and backs her off.

--Tim Dang (Tsujimoto 52)
Lesson 3: Verbal Chase

*Purpose:* To warm up and to increase spontaneity.

*Preparatory Lesson:* None.

*Time Required:* 20 minutes.

*Objective:* The student will practice questioning and responding to questions spontaneously.

*Description:* Ask a volunteer to come to the front of the class. Explain that he or she is to respond to questions as quickly as possible without bothering to think of the "best" answer. Ask the volunteer questions he or she does not expect. For example, if the student is asked where he or she is, the next question should not be "Why are you there?" The student probably thought of an answer to this question after he or she thought of a location. Instead, a question like "How much time do you have?", for which the student is presumably unprepared, requires him or her to spontaneously free associate. An example of a dialogue from this game is provided below.

After a few minutes of questioning the volunteer, and once the rest of the class sees how the game works, divide the class into pairs so everyone can play the game. After 10-15 minutes, players will switch roles; the questioner will respond and the responder will question. (Johnstone 129)

*Notes:* The important thing is that both players ask and respond to questions as quickly as possible. If students have difficulty questioning or responding spontaneously, tap a desk or use a metronome so that students can hear a steady beat. Have them ask and answer questions to the beat.

This is a good physical warmup if the responder mimes the actions as he or she describes them.
Sample Verbal Chase:

"Where are you?"
"Here!"
"You're not. Where are you?"
"In a box."
"Who put you there?"
"Mummy."
"She's not really your mummy. Who is she?"
"She's my aunt."
"What's her secret plan?"
"To kill me."
"What with?"
"A knife."
"She sticks the knife where?"
"In...in...in my stomach."
"She cuts it open and takes out a handful of papery..."
"Boxes."
"On the boxes is written...?"
"Help!" (Johnstone 129)
Lesson 4: Poetry Triangles

Purpose: To improve students' spontaneity, and to continue having them write poetry.

Preparatory Lesson: Modeling Poetry

Time Required: 30 minutes to an entire class period, depending upon the number of poems written.

Equipment Required: Triangles of paper on which various trigger phrases are written. (See below.)

Objective: The student will spontaneously write a wide variety of poems inspired by trigger phrases. He or she will gain experience writing poetry.

Description: Students sit in a circle. Each student needs plenty of paper and a pen or pencil. Give each student a poetry triangle and instruct them to write a poem in response to the trigger phrase. After 5 minutes, students will pass their triangles to their right, and write a new poem based on their new poetry triangle. Continue until everyone has written a poem based on each triangle, or until a pre-determined time limit is reached. Allow enough time after the exercise for students to share their poems and discuss their reactions to the experience. (Hurst-Hoffman)

Notes: For a class mature enough to view it as another challenge to the game rather than an excuse to be rowdy, an effective addition to this lesson is to give the students an objective to accomplish besides writing poems. They are to write notes to each other without being caught by the teacher standing in the middle of the circle. This added goal makes the game more challenging for the students and makes their poetry more spontaneous because of the "distraction."
Sample Poetry Triangles:

"sticky words, fat words, skinny words"
"on your head"
"sigh sigh sigh"
"If you trip and fall..."
"Give me that!"
"yellow"
"growling petitely"
"Things you shouldn't hang on your wall"
"Hypnotize"
"Fear"
"Yes"
"No"
"I've Never Told Anyone This Before"
"Noodle-nose"
"When I was young"
"Love"
"in my dreams I see..."
"OW! OUCH!"
"speech bubble"
"you are in a cereal box and you get bored." (Hurst-Hoffman)
Lesson 5: Poem Prologues

Purpose: To introduce students to performing poetry and to putting poems into context.

Preparatory Lesson: None.

Time Required: One class period.

Equipment Required: None.

Objective: The student will specifically analyze a poem and will write and perform a scene based upon his or her analysis. The student will also gain experience working artistically and creatively with a partner.

Description: Divide the class in half. Pass out handout featuring "Separation" and "you fit into me" and assign one of the poems to each group. For ten minutes students should write specific descriptions of the characters and events of the poem. Ask them to describe who the speaker is, who or what "you" is, the relationship between the two, and what event happened to trigger the speaker. Emphasize that the more specificity the better. What are the names of these people? What are they wearing? What is the weather like? How long have they known each other? Where are they? How did they meet?

When the ten minutes are up, have the students find a partner within their own group. Instruct the students that they and their partner are to decide on a scenario that inspired this poem. They are to write a short scene in dialogue form that serves as a "prologue" to the poem. The dialogue should open with a brief description of the setting, and the final line of the dialogue should be the poem itself. Give the students 10-15 minutes to write the dialogue. Explain to the students that the prologues they are writing will be given to pairs from the other half of the class for them to perform. Knowing that someone else will be reading their words should prompt students to take even more effort in the writing.
When time is up, collect the prologues and pass them out to the other half of the class studying the other poem. Allow five minutes for the students to familiarize themselves with the lines of the prologue they have been given, then have each group present the prologue. Encourage the students to get up and perform the prologue, but allow them the option to read it from their seats if they wish.

Most likely, the performances will take the rest of the class period. Regardless of how long the performances take, after all the students have performed the prologues, lead the class in a discussion of the performances and the poems. Which prologues seemed to explain or capture the spirit of the poem best? How did the scenes differ from each other? What did the students learn by seeing their writing performed and performing someone else's work? What did they learn by seeing the other scenes?

Notes: A possible follow-up exercise to this lesson is to have the students perform the poems again, without the prologues. This time, however, the poem will not be read as one of the characters' lines in a scene; the entire group of students will perform the poem together. This challenges them to take their understanding of the poem and present it in a thematically unified whole. This also teaches them to look at the totality of a poem when they present it. If they do not have a conception of the larger picture, their performances will resemble a bad pantomime "theater for the deaf" with each student acting out the literal imagery of each line.
Poem Prologue Handout:

Instructions: For your poem describe the speaking voice of the poem. Who is speaking? Who is the "you" the speaker is addressing? What are their names? Where are they? What happened between these people? Be as specific as you can.

Poem #1

"Separation"
Your absence has gone through me
Like thread through a needle.
Everything I do is stitched with its color

--W. S. Merwin (1296)

Poem #2

you fit into me
like a hook into an eye

a fish hook
an open eye

--Margaret Atwood (1375)
Lesson 6: Poetry TV

*Purpose:* To build students' ability and confidence to perform poetry dramatically.

*Preparatory Lesson: Poem Prologues*

*Time Required:* One class period.

*Objective:* The student will analyze a poem thematically and create an original performance of the poem reflecting that analysis. The student will continue to gain experience working in a group.

*Description:* Teaching in the role of an executive for a cable television network, "hire" the class to create poetry videos of Langston Hughes' "Harlem" for "PTV," a brand-new cable channel. Pass out copies of the poem and have the students write for 10-15 minutes on the appropriate location, music, costumes, and lighting for a video of the poem. Divide the students into groups of four or five and give the groups 20 minutes to agree on a concept for their video, divide the lines of the poem between them, and rehearse their performance before they present it to the class as a whole. Stipulate that all groups must remain faithful to the text of the poem, and that every person must speak at least part of the poem.

After 20 minutes have the groups perform their videos. When all the groups have performed, invite them to imagine that they are now a panel screening the videos for "PTV." Which of the videos will they choose to go on the air? Why? How could these videos be improved to present the poem even better?

*Notes:* While students are rehearsing, encourage them to use the skills they learned from Poem Prologues. Remind them that they are competing against other poetry video artists who are also striving for this lucrative contract. Performances that are distinctive, creative and original will be preferred by the PTV panel screening the videos.
This particular poem works well because a video analog does exist. Spike Lee’s film *Do the Right Thing* contains all the elements of this poem, especially in its explosive ending. While the film is probably too graphic to be shown in most classrooms, it is popular enough that most students will be familiar with it. This will also inspire students to look for parallels to other poems studied in class.

*Poetry TV Handout:*

"Harlem"

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore--
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over--
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

*Or does it explode?*

--Langston Hughes (1069)
Lesson 7: Choral Reading Warmup

Purpose: To introduce choral reading.

Preparatory Lesson: None.

Time Required: 20 minutes.

Objective: The student will experience the range of possibilities when a poem is read aloud. He or she will understand the different effects produced by changes in pitch, tempo, and volume.

Description: Explain to the class that they have become a collective musical instrument. Have them decide what sound their instrument should make. It should be a sound that can be made at low and high pitches and volumes. Once the sound has been decided, "play" the class by conducting them with hand gestures. Pointing to them is their signal to make their sound. Control the pitch with the right hand, the volume with the left. The higher the hand is raised, the higher the pitch or the greater the volume; the lower the hand, the lower the pitch or volume. Allow students to try their hands at conducting.

Next, divide class into a four-part "choir" of readers: sopranos, altos, tenors, and basses. Each voice part will stand in a different corner of the room. Have the class begin reciting "Mary had a little lamb" or some other easy rhyme under direction. Only those voice parts that are directed to should speak; meanwhile the others are prepared to continue reciting the poem when the direction shifts to them. Repeat the nursery rhyme as many times as necessary in order for students to become proficient at being conducted. Conclude by allowing students the opportunity to become conductors with different nursery rhymes.

Notes: To make the differentiation between pitch and volume clearer, wear different colored gloves, or use different colored pencils as batons.
Lesson 8: Choral Reading Performance

*Purpose:* To perform a choral reading of a poem

*Preparatory Lesson:* Choral Reading Warmup

*Time Required:* One class period.

*Equipment Required:* None.

*Objective:* The student will analyze a poem as an oral / aural text and create an original performance with a group. By comparing performances, students will learn the range of options available with a single poetic text.

*Description:* Divide class into the Choral Reading Warmup "choir" of readers. Pass out copies of the "music" (first handout) so students can familiarize themselves with the words. Using the same techniques used in the Choral Reading Warmup, conduct the class' reading of 'Ozymandias." Repeat the exercise, varying the tempo and dynamics. As a class, discuss the effect of the performance on the poem. How was the poem different each time? Did the different versions change the mood or feeling of the poem?

Divide the class into two or three groups and give each group a copy of "Paradoxes and Oxymorons" so they can orchestrate it on their own. Give them 20 minutes to orchestrate and rehearse, then have the groups perform. After the performances, have the students compare and discuss the artistic and creative choices they made.
**Choral Reading Performance Handout #1:**

Performance instructions are in brackets.

[All] "Ozymandias"

[Alto:] I met a traveler from an antique land

Who said: [Tenor:] Two vast and trunkless legs of stone

Stand in the desert . . . [Sop.:] Near them, on the sand,

[Bass:] Half sunk, [Sop.:] a shattered visage lies, [Tenor:] whose frown,

[Sop.:] And wrinkled lip, [Bass:] and sneer of cold command,

[Sop.:] Tell that its sculptor well those passions read

[Bass/Tenor:] Which yet survive, [Alto, lifelessly:] stamped on these lifeless

things,

[Tenor:] The hand that mocked them, [Bass:] and the heart that fed:

[Alto:] And on the pedestal these words appear:

[Bass:] "My name is Ozymandias, [Tenors join:] king of kings:

[Altos join:] Look on my works, ye Mighty, [Sops join:] and despair!"

[Pause]

[Sop, soft:] Nothing beside remains. [Tenor, soft:] Round the decay

Of that colossal wreck, [Bass, soft:] boundless and bare

[Alto, soft:] The lone and level sands stretch far away.

--Shelley
Choral Reading Performance Handout #2:

"Paradoxes and Oxymorons"

This poem is concerned with language on a very plain level.
Look at it talking to you. You look out a window
Or pretend to fidget. You have it but you don't have it.
You miss it, it misses you. You miss each other.

The poem is sad because it wants to be yours, and cannot.
What's a plain level? It is that and other things,
Bringing a system of them into play. Play?
Well, actually, yes, but I consider play to be

A deeper outside thing, a dreamed role-pattern,
As in the division of grace these long August days
Without proof. Open-ended. And before you know
It gets lost in the steam and chatter of typewriters.

It has been played once more. I think you exist only
To tease me into doing it, on your level, and then you aren't there
Or have adopted a different attitude. And the poem
Has set me softly down beside you. The poem is you.

--John Ashbery (1292)

Notes: The student work can be done in groups or as a class. Either way, it will facilitate the performance if a transparency of the "music" is projected so everyone can see.
Lesson 9: Spell-Making

*Purpose:* To teach assonance.

*Preparatory Lesson:* None.

*Time Required:* 30 minutes.

*Equipment Required:* pencils.

*Objective:* The student will write a "magick" spell using assonance and onomatopoeia. He or she will see the effect of those sound devices upon poetry.

*Description:* In a ritualistic manner, present each student with a pencil. Explain to the class that they are now sorcerers or witches, possessed of immense magical power. The pencils they have received can channel their magic, but only after a spell of power has been cast on each pencil. Ask the class to come up with an appropriate incantation for the spell of power. What does such an incantation sound like? What gives the incantation its magic? Once the class has agreed to the incantation, have them cast it on each of their pencils, making the pencils truly "magick."

Explain to the students that the "magick pencils" each have a powerful spell for its owner to use. Have the students get out a sheet of paper and, opening themselves up to the magic their pencils have for them, begin letting the pencil write the spell down on the paper. Once they know what each of their spells do, the students will write the incantation that creates the spell on their paper. When all are finished, have them share the spells with the entire class, speaking them and writing them on the board.

Based on the board of incantations, discuss what makes an incantation magical. Discuss the power of the sounds of words. Lead them to a discussion of assonance and onomatopoeia as they are used in the students' spells. Explain the terms and let the students explain why they are such effective devices. Pass out copies of poems that use these sound devices (see Notes for examples) and have the students discuss what kind of
spell is created by these poetic incantations.

Notes: As a homework assignment or journal entry, have the students use their "magick pencils" to create poetry. Suggest that they specifically use that pencil for that purpose, perhaps decorating it to make it even more magical.

Poems to use in this assignment include: "Jabberwocky" by Lewis Carroll, "Beat! beat! drums!" by Walt Whitman, "Congo" by Vachel Lindsay, or any poem by Edgar Allan Poe.
Lesson 10: Tongue Twisters

*Purpose:* To teach alliteration.

*Preparatory Lesson:* None.

*Time Required:* 30 minutes.

*Objective:* The student will write original tongue-twisters and learn the effectiveness of alliteration in poetry. He or she will also hear the effect of different alliterative sounds in writing.

*Description:* Begin with the Idiosyncrasy Notebook trigger: "A tongue twister based on your name." Share and discuss the tongue twisters. Do the tongue twisters describe their authors, or are they just hard to say? Have the students close their eyes and imagine a specific famous person or object. Have them write a second tongue twister (alliterative phrase) that describes that person or object using that person or object's name. (5 minutes) Have students share their tongue twisters with the class, acting them out as they read them. Discuss. How effectively did writers describe their subjects? What made them effective? What kinds of names work well with this type of writing?

Generate a list on the board of people and objects who have names that can easily be put into descriptive tongue twisters. Make sure the students understand that it is the consonant sounds of a name they should be looking at, rather than the name itself. Keep students' focus on alliteration, rather than onomatopoeia. This is a good opportunity to explain the terms and the distinctions. Ask students to make generalizations about the names on the board and the tongue twisters they could inspire. What makes the name of a famous athlete sound athletic? What kinds of tongue twisters are especially hard to say? What makes them so? Are there tongue twisters that are easy to say? Out of this discussion students should hear differences between alliteration using plosive consonants (t's, d's and g's, for example) and more sibilant consonants (like s's, m's, and l's).
Lesson 11: I am the Consonant

Purpose: To increase students' awareness of consonant sounds.

Preparatory Lesson: Tongue Twisters

Time Required: 30 minutes, although an entire class period can be utilized.

Equipment Required: Bag of Scrabble letter tiles (consonants only).

Objective: The student will discover physical movements analogous to consonant sounds. He or she will practice responding physically and spontaneously to sounds.

Description: Have the students physicalize the consonants. Tell them to make the sound of "b" in as many ways as they can, finding movements that fit that sound. (Side Coach them with questions like: "What kind of face does the sound of 'b' create?" "How does it make you move?") As a class or as individuals continue through the entire alphabet of consonants.

When students are comfortable with physicalizing consonants and improvising movement with them, bring out the bag of Scrabble tiles. One student at a time takes two tiles out of the bag and improvises movement around the gibberish words created by those two consonants. (For example, a student who picks a "G" and an "R" must improvise using only those two sounds. That might lead to a dog "grrrrrr-ing" or a monster "grinding" something.) Side coach with phrases like: "What words come to mind as you say those sounds together? How do they make you move? Don't think, respond to the sounds!" Give every student the chance to play.

Notes: If the students are willing, suggest that two people, each with a pair of consonants, improvise a scene together.
Lesson 12: Poetry Word Association

Purpose: To have students explore the connotations of words in poems.

Preparatory Lesson: Modeling (although I am the Consonant would provide a good introduction, especially if the words are unfamiliar and hold no connotations for the students.)

Time Required: One class period.

Objective: The student will create an original poem inspired by words from another poem. He or she will see the significance of specific poetic choices to the poem as a whole.

Description: Announce to the class that they are going to play a word association game. As a word is read, each person should write down whatever word comes to mind in response. The words read aloud should be taken from an existing poem that will be analyzed after the free association is finished. After all words are read and responded to, each student should write a poem using the words he or she wrote on the paper. The words themselves may be used, or they may simply serve as inspiration. After the poems are finished, share and respond to them as a class. Discuss the mood and feelings the original words inspired. What did the students hear in the words? How did they incorporate their feelings in their poems?

Finally, pass out the poem from which the original words were read, and have the class compare it with their own poems. How close did the class come to the thoughts and feelings in the poet's mind?

Poetry Word Association Handout:

"Anthem for Doomed Youth"

What passing-bells for those who die as cattle?  
Only the monstrous anger of the guns.  
Only the stuttering rifle's rapid rattle  
Can patter out their hasty orisons.  
No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells,  
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs--  
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;  
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.  

What candles may be held to speed them all?  
Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes  
Shall shine the holy glimmers of the good-byes.  
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;  
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,  
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

--Wilfred Owen (1036)

Notes: As a follow-up lesson, divide the class into pairs. Each student prepares a list of words from another poem with which his or her partner can free associate. Have the pairs of students create original poems based on these lists and compare them with the original poems. All the pairs will then report on their work to the class as a whole.
Lesson 13: Perambulating Poems

Purpose: To build students' rapport with poetry, and encourage physicality.

Preparatory Lesson: I am the Consonant

Time Required: 30 minutes.

Equipment Required: None.

Objective: The student will spontaneously move in response to a poetic line, gaining confidence physically and spontaneously to a text.

Description: Pass out copies of "Motorcyclists," "Root Cellar," and "Child on Top of a Greenhouse". Have students read the poems out loud to themselves as they walk around the room. Encourage them to explore the kinds of movements that each poem suggests to them. The initial part of the class is simply exploratory; students should not be concerned about the other class members moving around them. Side coach with phrases like: "Let your body hear the poem." "Hear the poem with your feet and arms."

Once students are comfortable with movement, divide the class into two groups; have them stand in lines facing each other across the classroom. Have the first student in one line cross to the end of the other line while saying the first line of the first poem. He or she should try and move in a way appropriate to the line. Suggest to the students that the physical distance across the classroom is akin to the length of the line; side coach with phrases like, "Fill the space with line."

When the first student has crossed to the other side, moving with the poetry, the first student from the other side will continue the poem, crossing to the back of the other line, while reciting and moving with the next line of poetry. The flow of the poetry should be smooth, as should be the movements across the length of the classroom. When the first poem is finished, the students should continue with the
next poem until everyone has had a chance to move to a poem. After completion of
the exercise, discuss the exercise and the poems. Why did students move as they
did? What did it feel like to speak the line that way? How was the effect of the lines
changed by the movement? Were the movements appropriate?

Notes: Descriptive poems that are rich in imagery and have a consistent tone
work well for this exercise. Examples are below.

**Perambulating Poems Handout:**

"Motorcyclists"

How I envy the confident
easy performers, at home
on the road, who move
as if daddy owned stock
in the company, speak
their lines carelessly
never at a loss, who
know from the first what
their part and the name
of the play is and die
when they do, wherever
they are, boots on, arms
and legs every which way
themselves to the very end.

--Kenneth O. Hanson (30)
Perambulating Poems Handout cont.:

"Root Cellar"

Nothing would sleep in that cellar, dank as a ditch,
Bulbs broke out of boxes hunting for chinks in the dark,
Shoots dangled and drooped,
Lolling obscenely from mildewed crates,
Hung down long yellow evil necks, like tropical snakes.
And what a congress of stink!--
Roots ripe as old bait,
Pulpy stems, rank, silo-rich,
Leaf-mould, manure, lime, piled against slippery planks.
Nothing would give up life:
Even the dirt kept breathing a small breath.

--Theodore Roethke (1117)

"Child on Top of a Greenhouse"

The wind billowing out the seat of my britches,
My feet crackling splinters of glass and dried putty,
The half-grown chrysanthemums staring up like accusers,
Up through the streaked glass, flashing with sunlight,
A few white clouds all rushing eastward,
A line of elms plunging and tossing like horses,
And everyone, everyone pointing up and shouting!

--Theodore Roethke (11)
Lesson 14: I am the Poem

Purpose: To continue students' work physicalizing poems.

Preparatory Lesson: Perambulating Poems Previous work with improvisation is also helpful.

Time Required: One class period.

Equipment Required: None.

Objective: The student will specifically analyze his or her responses to a chosen poem in the process of physicalizing the poem dramatically. In choosing a poem to perform the student will also analyze a variety of poems outside of class.

Description: For homework, students find a poem from an anthology that they find appealing and interesting and bring a copy of it to class. Pass out copies of the handout (see below) and give students ten minutes to fill it out as completely and specifically as they can.

After the handouts are all filled out, ask for three volunteers. Explain that the volunteers, building on the answers they gave on their handouts, will physicalize the poems they brought to class. Collect copies of the volunteers' poems and read them aloud to the class. Do not reveal which volunteer picked which poem.

If the volunteers are comfortable and experienced with improvisation, have them perform a scene taking place at a bus-stop. Ask them to try and show physically what kind of poem they are. As an additional challenge, ask them to interact with the other two volunteers during their scene. How, for instance, how will a heroic and rhythmic poem like "The Charge of the Light Brigade" respond to a contemplative poem like Emily Dickinson's "I heard a Fly buzz--when I died--"?

If the volunteers are less comfortable improvising, have them walk in character to the front of the room and take a chair. Ask them questions from the handout to which
they must respond in character. This will be a poetic "What's My Line?"

Whether the volunteers are accomplished or inexperienced, do not reveal which person played which poem until after the class as a whole has had the chance to guess and explain the reasoning behind their guesses. Reveal the performers' poetic identities and call up three more volunteers.

When all volunteers are finished, have the class discuss and evaluate the lesson as a whole. How did the questions on the handout change each student's perception of his or her poem? What other questions would have been helpful or interesting to answer? Where did the students find inspiration for the answers they wrote on the handout?

Notes: Once the performers' poems are revealed, and before the next group of volunteers is picked, the class has a good opportunity to evaluate their peers' performances in a non-judgmental way. Ask them which performer captured the essence of his or her poem the best, and how might the performances have been made even better.

To follow up this lesson with a writing assignment, have the students write a letter from the poem describing and explaining itself to an admirer. This builds on the analysis the students began in class, and also sharpens their ability to write with a specific voice. Share the best papers with the class as a whole and let them see how personality can be communicated through writing.
I am the Poem Handout:

Answer the following questions as specifically and thoroughly as possible. Use your knowledge of the poem and your own creativity to supply the answer.

1. If this poem were any person, who would he or she be? Why?

2. If this poem were a person, how old would he or she be? Why?

3. What color best suits this poem? Why?

4. Where would this poem most like to visit? Why?

5. How would this poem like to get to that place? By foot? By Car? Why?

6. How would this poem dress? Why?

7. What kind of music would this poem like? Why?


9. What would this poem's Halloween costume be? Why?

10. What would this poem watch on television? Why?
Lesson 15: Haiku Poster

Purpose: To encourage the students' ability to visualize images in a poem.

Preparatory Lesson: None.

Time Required: Two class periods.

Equipment Required: Paper, markers, crayons, and art supplies.

Objective: The student will create and illustrate an original haiku, learning the concise and imagistic nature of the genre.

Description: Begin the class by having each student make a list of the items he or she will place in a personal time capsule. Ask them to try and show the future who they are as individuals. Allow 5 or 10 minutes for the students to work, then discuss the time capsules as a class. Break the bad news to the students that the powers-that-be have specifically outlawed all those items from all time capsules. Each student can leave only a single poem to the future: a haiku. Give students examples of haiku poetry, and explain the structure of haiku. It is a three line poem with five syllables in the first line, seven in the second, and five in the third. If possible, show students illustrated or calligraphic versions of haiku and ask them to create their own.

Notes: As a related assignment, have each student find a poem he or she likes enough to illustrate. Give each student a sheet of posterboard, and ask them to create a poster of the poem. The complete text will be reproduced on the posterboard, accompanied by related illustrations. Urge the students to consider carefully the style of illustrations and the medium used to write the poem on the poster. For example, a poem like Mari Evans' "Vive Noir!" about life in the inner city, could be painted on the poster like graffiti.
Lesson 16: Perception Warmup

Purpose: To improve students' ability to perceive.

Preparatory Lesson: None, although it may be necessary to demonstrate this exercise with another student first, before the rest of the class tries it.

Time Required: 10-15 minutes.

Equipment Required: None.

Objective: The student will spontaneously make and respond to observations of a partner. He or she will gain experience working intensively with a partner.

Description: Two students are paired, facing each other. Taking turns each points out something he or she perceives about the other. This can range from simple descriptions of the physical ("Your eyes are blue.") to perceptions made about the partner's emotional state or reactions. ("You appear to enjoy this.") The partner then repeats the observation: "My eyes are blue," "I appear to enjoy this," and responds with a new observation.

Notes: Depending upon the purpose for which this exercise is used, other elaborations are possible. If the teacher wants to encourage spontaneity, for example, he or she might use a metronome or some other steady beat throughout the exercise and require the players to play the game in that tempo. This "distraction" will force them to go with first responses instead of spending time thinking.

If the point is to increase the range of students' perceptions, make this clear to them. Add an extra ground rule that no perception may be made more than once. This limitation requires the students to vary their observations.
Lesson 17: Color Commentary

Purpose: To sharpen students' perceptions about the changing mood and tone within a poem.

Preparatory Lesson: Perception Warmup

Time Required: One class period.

Equipment Required: Recording of Peter Schickele's "New Horizons in Music Appreciation--Beethoven's Fifth Symphony."

Objective: The student will write a commentary upon a poem in the style of a sports announcer. He or she will analyze the changes and developments within a poem.

Description: Begin class by playing the recording, a humorous sketch in which a pair of announcers for a classical radio show, in the style of sports broadcasters, provide "color commentary" on a performance of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. Get reactions from students, both on the recording specifically, and on sports broadcasting in general. How do good sports broadcasters serve the viewer or listener? Pass out copies of "The Bean Eaters" and divide the class into groups of three. Have each group analyze the poem and prepare their own commentary; it may be modeled after the recording, or be a serious effort intended to clarify the poem. One person will read the poem, while the other two give commentary. The presentation to the rest of the class is not to be improvised; a script must be written.

Give the students half an hour to work, then have each group perform. As a class, discuss and evaluate the performances at the end.

Notes: As a followup lesson, challenge the students to write a poem's color commentary in the style of real broadcasters. How would Dick Vitale discuss a poem by E. E. Cummings, for example? How would Howard Cosell approach a Shakespearean sonnet?
"The Bean Eaters"

They eat beans mostly, this old yellow pair.
Dinner is a casual affair.
Plain chipware on a plain and creaking wood,
Tin flatware.

Two who are Mostly Good.
Two who have lived their day,
But keep on putting on their clothes
And putting things away.

And remembering...
Remembering, with twinklings and twinges,
As they lean over the beans in their rented back room that is full of beads
and receipts and dolls and clothes, tobacco crumbs, vases and fringes.

--Gwendolyn Brooks (1183)
Lesson 18: Spontaneous Synthesis

Purpose: To improve students' ability to write spontaneously and synthesize spontaneously.

Preparatory Lesson: Some kind of spontaneity warmup.

Time Required: 15 minutes or longer, depending upon how many times the exercise is repeated.

Equipment Required: None.

Objective: The student will spontaneously list random words which he or she will then relate to each other. The student will gain proficiency at thinking spontaneously.

Description: The Idiosyncrasy Notebook trigger for the day instructs students to "make a list of words that are completely unrelated to each other." Immediately after the two minutes of notebook writing, tell the students to continue writing in their notebooks; now, however, they must explain how all the words on their list relate after all. After another two or three minutes, instruct the students to make another list of random, unrelated words. At a random moment while the students are preparing lists, tell them to go back to relating the words. This time, each student must write a connection between the first and second words, then between the second and third, and so on.

This exercise is game-playing. Keep the students alternating between generating random words and making connections between those words. Always work to keep the students off-guard; this will challenge them to try even harder. Instead of always having students devise connections between words on their own list, make them change lists with the person next to them and make connections between words on the new list. Have them write poems and dialogues using the unrelated words on the list.
Notes: If students are having a difficult time spontaneously generating lists of words and spontaneously making connections, they are thinking too much; "distract" them with rhythmic music, hand-clapping, or a metronome.

Once the students are adept at this game, apply their skill to studying poetry. Begin by having them write brief analyses of one of the poems formed around random words. Next, in a variation on Poetry Word Association, give students key words from a poem and ask them to make connections between those words. Once they have, show them the poem from which those words came; discuss with them whether the connections they made have any validity within the poem itself. Did the poet have some of those connections in mind when he or she picked those particular words?
Lesson 19: Title Games

Purpose: To continue student improvisational work, to introduce students to making artistic choices, and to prepare for Beheaded Poems.

Preparatory Lesson: None, although previous lessons involving improvisational work would be useful.

Time Required: Two class periods.

Equipment Required: A collection of interesting objects.

Objective: The student will work with a group and prepare two improvisational scenes. The first is based upon an object; the second is inspired by a title. The student will gain experience at making a variety of artistic choices in response to different stimuli.

Description: Divide class into groups of four or five. Each group takes an object with which they will create an improvisation. Half of the groups leave the room to work, so that students in one group will not see the scenes improvised by the other group. After 20 minutes, all groups must come up with a title for their scene and write it down on a sheet of paper. Next, trade the improvisation scene titles and objects across the groups, so that the students in one half of the class are given titles created by the students in the other half. The groups separate again from each other and create a new improvised scene based around the new title. This will take the remainder of the class period.

For the next class, each group performs its scene. After all the scenes are performed the entire class discusses the differences between the scenes. How did each group respond to the scene for which they provided a title? How was it different from the original scene with the same title? What difference does a title make to a piece? How does one create a title?

Note: Although this exercise is not specifically about poetry, it provides an introduction for the next two lessons.
Lesson 20: Famous Photographers

Purpose: To improve students' evaluative skills, to open students' awareness of titles, and to prepare for The Case of the Beheaded Poems.

Preparatory Lesson: Title Games.

Time Required: One class period.

Equipment Required: An instant developing camera.

Objective: The student will play a role in class, either as a photographer or a judge. Within the role-playing the student will make artistic and analytical choices, leading to an appreciation of the aesthetic.

Description: Begin the class by picking a pair of students to improvise and pantomime a scene. They are to leave the room for 2-3 minutes and decide what their scene will be about. When they perform the scene, they must "show" what is going on, as they will not be allowed to speak during the scene. If they are inexperienced at improvisation, suggest a simple action for the to perform, like washing the dishes; otherwise give them free rein to be creative.

While the assigned actors are out of the room, explain to the class that five of them are world-famous photographers. Select or allow volunteers for the five and tell them that the scene they are about to see should give them the opportunity to catch a Pulitzer prize-winning shot. While the scene is going on, each photographer will get one chance to shout "freeze," stopping the performers in their places. While the scene is frozen, the photographer who shouted, gets the camera and takes that perfect shot. (Explain that the shot can be anything; it does not have to be a picture encompassing the entire scene.) When the photographer is finished, the scene continues until all five photographers have taken their pictures.
Have each photographer decide on a title for his or her photo and share it with the rest of the class. Open up the discussion to the evaluative decisions required in taking the shot and giving it a title. Let the rest of the class vote on the winner of the Pulitzer, and discuss their reasons for voting as they did. When would they have stopped the scene? What angle would they have picked? What element would they have focused on? What would they have called their picture?

Notes: If a camera is unavailable, give the students empty picture frames. Stop the scene at some random moment, and allow the five photographers to line up the shot they would take if they had a camera; the picture frame represents the camera's field of vision. This version, of course, does eliminate the students' choice of when during the scene to take the picture, but still allows them to pick a shot and a title.

This exercise, like Title Games prepares students for the next exercise, The Case of the Beheaded Poems, by calling on them to make artistic evaluative decisions. These are related to the evaluative skills poets and artists utilize.
Lesson 21: The Case of the Beheaded Poems

Purpose: To apply the evaluative skills developed over the past two lessons to specific poems.

Preparatory Lessons: Title Games, Famous Photographers.

Time Required: One class period.

Equipment Required: None.

Objective: The student will analyze three poems stylistically and thematically, inventing a title for each poem. From comparing his or her choices with the original titles the student will gain greater understanding of the poets' aesthetic judgement.

Description: Teaching in the role of a police lieutenant, explain to the class that they are each Poetry Cops, assigned to discover as much as possible about three poems that have been found beheaded, that is, without titles. Pass out copies of "In a Station of the Metro," "Nationality," and "Girl and Horse, 1928". Do not provide the titles to the students. Working with a partner, each student is to invent a title for each poem. Give the class 10 minutes to do this.

After 10 minutes, have the class discuss their findings, writing their suggestions for the titles on the board. Conclude this discussion by telling the titles of the poems, but do not reveal which title goes with which poem. Let the students discover that on their own. Have each partnership turn in short written reports to their "lieutenant" explaining the significance of each poem's title. Ask them to consider how the title changes their perception of the poem as a whole.

Collect the reports and have the students discuss their reactions to the exercise. How does a title help a poem? Why did each poet pick the particular title he or she did? Which do the students think came first, the title or the poem?
Notes: To help the students play their roles as detectives, mangle and coffee-stain the copies of the poems and stuff them into envelopes marked "evidence."

The Case of the Beheaded Poems Handout:

"In a Station of the Metro"
The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

--Ezra Pound (963)

"Nationality"

I have grown past hate and bitterness,
I see the world as one;
Yet, though I can no longer hate,
My son is still my son.

All men at God's round table sit,
And all men must be fed;
But this loaf in my hand.
This loaf is my son's bread.

--Mary Gilmore (195)
"Girl and Horse, 1928"

You are younger than I am, you are
someone I never knew, you stand
under a tree, your face half-shadowed,
holding the horse by its bridle.

Why do you smile? Can't you
see the apple blossoms falling around
you, snow, sun, snow, listen, the tree
dries and is being burnt, the wind

is bending your body, your face
ripples like water where did you go
But no, you stand there exactly
the same, you can't hear me, forty

years ago you were caught by light
and fixed in that secret
place where we live, where we believe
nothing can change, grow older.

(On the other side
of the picture, the instant
is over, the shadow
of the tree has moved. You wave,

then turn and ride
out of sight through the vanished
orchard, still smiling
as though you do not notice)

--Margaret Atwood (149-150)
Lesson 22: Seurat Painting/Seurat Poem

Purpose: To have students explore creativity visually, to introduce poetic structure, and to encourage attention to individual lines of poetry.

Preparatory Lesson: None.

Time Required: Two class periods.

Equipment Required: A copy of a painting by Georges Seurat (such as "Bridge at Courbevoie" or "Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte"), a color laser-copy of the same painting, sheets of unlined white paper, and crayons, pens, or other art supplies.

Objective: The student will structurally analyze both a painting and a poem, making connections between two apparently dissimilar art forms. In addition, by creating original lines of poetry modeled on lines from the given poem, the student will see the structural significance each line of poetry has upon the poem as a whole.

Description: Before class, mark a grid on the laser-copy of the painting so that there are as many blocks of the grid as there are students. On the back of each block, mark its position in relation to the entire grid. (Use letters for columns and numbers for rows, like the notation in the game Battleship.) Cut the laser-copy into its component blocks.

At the beginning of class, give one block to each student. Do not show them the composite painting. Have them draw their inspiration from the block they have, and draw, color, or paint their own version of it on a full sheet of white paper. The emphasis here is on their own creativity, rather than their ability to perfectly recreate the smaller picture. Allow the rest of the class period to complete the artwork, or assign it as homework.

The next day, when all the artwork is complete, assemble them in a grid on the wall.
using the grid notation from the smaller blocks to clarify where each picture should go.
Display the complete uncut copy of the painting and discuss the differences between the
two. How does the viewer's reaction change when looking at the entire painting, rather
than a fragment? How do the fragments affect the larger work? Why is a pointilistic
painting appropriate for an exercise like this? (Hurst-Hoffman)

After the discussion is finished, give each student a different line of poetry from a
poem. Label each line with its line number within the entire poem. Have the students
respond to the lines of poetry in the same way they did the blocks of the Seurat painting:
taking inspiration from the given line, they are to write a new poetic line that conveys as
much of the feeling and power of the original line as possible.

When students have finished their individual lines, have them write the original lines
in order on the board, with the new versions alongside. As a class, read both poems
aloud and discuss them. How are the two poems different? What has remained in the
new poem? Why? Have each student discuss the creative and evaluative process he or
she went through in rewriting the line.

Notes: The color laser copy needed for the first part of this exercise is easily and
inexpensively made at any commercial copying outlet.

Depending upon class size, there may have to be more than one poem; if so, mark
not only which number line the students have, but also the poem. Label the poems "A,"
"B," "C," and so forth, so that students are not given extra clues.

An alternate game can be a version of Poetry Triangles. Have the students pass
the original lines around in a circle, writing a version of each one, until each student has
an adaptation of the original poem or poems.
Lesson 23: Jigsaw Poem

Purpose: To work further with poetic structure, and to introduce sonnet form.

Preparatory Lesson: Seurat Painting/Seurat Poem.

Time Required: One class period.

Objective: The student will discover firsthand the structure and form of the sonnet. In addition, the student will gain facility with group work.

Description: As with Seurat Poem, give each student a line from a poem. Class-size permitting, each line should come from a sonnet. If the class is too small, use shorter poems that have the same metrical structure. (Example: three limericks, or two eight-line poems with the same rhyme scheme.) This time, however, do not give line-numbers, and do not indicate from which poem the line comes. Tell the class only how many poems were divided up for the game. Explain that the objective is simply to find the other lines of their poem and recreate it.

Once the students have put together the poems, have each group present its poem to the class, either as a performance or a choral reading. Afterwards, pass out copies of the original poems so the students can see how accurate they were. Discuss the choices they had to make as they evaluated the lines in conjunction with each other. How did they decide that lines belonged in the same poem? How did they decide the order of lines?

Notes: Since the students will have had to understand the structure of the sonnets to recreate them, it is an easy step to discuss the definition of a sonnet, and the way that the structure influences the flow of the poem overall.

If the sonnets are of different types (Italian vs. English, as in the example), then the opportunities for discussion and comparison are even greater. This lesson leads easily into a study of meter with Metronomic Poetry and Marching Meter, or directly into Living Line if Shakespeare's Sonnet 55 is one of the sonnets used.
Jigsaw Poem Examples:

"On First Looking into Chapman's Homer"

Much have I traveled in the realms of gold,  
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;  
Round many western islands have I been  
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.  
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told  
That deep-browed Homer ruled as his demesne;  
Yet did I never breath its pure serene  
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:  
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
When a new planet swims into his ken;  
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes  
He stared at the Pacific--and all his men  
Looked at each other with a wild surmise--  
Silent, upon a peak in Darien. --John Keats

Sonnet 73

That time of year thou mayst in me behold  
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang  
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,  
Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.  
In me thou seest the twilight of such day  
As after sunset fadeth in the west;  
Which by and by black night doth take away,  
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.  
In me thou seest the glowing of such fire,  
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,  
As the deathbed whereon it must expire,  
Consumed with that which it was nourished by.  
This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,  
To love that well which thou must leave ere long. --Shakespeare
Lesson 24: Metronomic Poetry

Purpose: To introduce students to rhythm

Preparatory Lesson: None.

Time Required: 30 minutes.

Equipment Required: A metronome, rhythm instruments.

Objective: The student will analyze a poem as an oral text, exploring the variety of tempos and rhythms available to the performer, and evaluating the effect those variations have upon the listener.

Description: Have the metronome running as class begins and while Idiosyncrasy Notebook writing is going on. Have some students share their writing aloud to the rest of the class. For each reader, change the tempo of the metronome. Discuss the effect of the metronome on their writing and reading. Divide students into groups of four or five and give each group a poem from the handout (see below). They will pick an appropriate tempo or set of tempos and perform their poem at that pace. They may use the metronome or keep time on their own by clapping or playing rhythm instruments.

Notes: During the discussion after the performances, ask students to consider how a poem is changed by different tempos. If there is time, or on another day, have the students perform again in a different tempo for comparison.
Metronomic Poetry Handout:

"The Eagle"
He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ringed with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

--Tennyson

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With wall and towers were girdled round:
And here were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree,
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

--Coleridge, from "Kubla Khan" (lines 1-11)
Lesson 25: Marching Meter

Purpose: To learn iambic, trochaic, anapestic, and dactylic meters.

Preparatory Lesson: Metronomic Poetry

Time Required: One class period.

Objective: The student will learn four different poetic meters and gain experience physicalizing poetry.

Description: Have students march in a circle around the room in an iambic pattern, beating or saying the tempo. ("left-RIGHT, left-RIGHT" or "dum-DA, dum-DA") Change the beat to trochaic and have students march in that rhythm. ("LEFT-right, LEFT-right", "DA-dum, DA-dum") Do the same with anapestic ("du-du-DA") and dactylic ("DA-du-du") rhythms. If students are stuck finding a way to move to these rhythms, have them clap their hands or snap their fingers on the unstressed beats and take a step on the stressed beats. Teach students the terms for each rhythm and make them march the particular rhythm called out. Keep shifting around, forcing students to learn the terms as they march.

After the marching is finished, discuss the different feeling each rhythm gives. Which feels most natural? (Probably iambic.) Which seems menacing or martial? (Trochaic.) What kinds of feelings are stirred up by anapestic or dactylic? What adjectives or pictures seem to go with each rhythm?

Pass out copies of the following passages and ask students to decide what rhythm fits each passage. Offer them the freedom to march around or beat the rhythms out with their hands; one hand beats the stressed beat, the other beats the unstressed. Have students read poems aloud to the tempos and rhythms they believe fit. Discuss their responses and findings as a class.

Notes: Follow this lesson by having students write, or bring in other examples of rhythmic poetry.
Marching Meter Handout:

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a curious volume of forgotten lore--
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.

--Edgar Allan Poe, from "The Raven" (lines 1-4)

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

--George Gordon, Lord Byron
"The Destruction of Sennacherib" (lines 1-4)

As I was going up the stair
I met a man who wasn't there!
He wasn't there again today!
I wish, I wish he'd stay away!

Hughes Mearns, "Antigonish" (232)

Woman much missed, how you call to me, call to me,
Saying that now you are not as you were
When you had changed from the one who was all to me,
But as at first, when our day was fair.

--Thomas Hardy, from "The Voice" (lines 1-4, 850)
Lesson 26: Living Line

Purpose: To elaborate on the structure of iambic pentameter, especially as Shakespeare uses it.

Preparatory Lesson: Marching Meter

Time Required: 30 minutes.

Equipment Required: None.

Objective: The student will learn the structure of iambic pentameter and better appreciate how that meter can be used dramatically.

Description: Pick ten students and tell them to physically show what five iambs in a row look like. One possible version might be five of them kneeling, representing the unstressed beats, alternating with the other five, standing up, representing the stressed beats. Explain that they have formed a living line of iambic pentameter. Pass out copies of the following Shakespearean passages and have the living line read the first speech, each person reading the syllable to which he or she corresponds. Have the stressed-beat readers repeat all the words or syllables each spoke, and then have the unstressed-beat readers repeat only their words or syllables. Discuss how Shakespeare uses the iambic pentameter to give structure to the scene. (Barnes)

Next have the line read the Hamlet speech which requires an eleventh person to add the feminine ending. Discuss the effect of the feminine ending. Why did Shakespeare choose it? Finish the exercise with the passage from Macbeth. Have two students read the lines, first pausing between lines, then reading the passage as one flowing piece of poetry. Discuss the effectiveness of each version. Once the students realize that reading the passage as a single line of verse increases the tension and the dramatic moment, they will not only understand why some lines in Shakespeare are indented, but will also see what a strict metrical format can achieve in the hands of a skilled poet.
Notes: As a final discussion point, point out that Lady Macbeth's final line, even though it is a single word, is written as an entire line of verse unto itself. Why? What might fill out the rest of that poetic line? What kind of poetic line is it?

Living Line Handout:

Sonnet 55

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme;
But you shall shine more bright in these contents
Than unswept stone, besmeared with sluttish time.
When wasteful war shall statues overturn,
And broils root out the work of masonry,
Nor Mars his sword nor war's quick fire shall burn
The living record of your memory.
'Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity
Shall you pace forth; your praise shall still find room
Even in the eyes of your posterity
That wears this world out to the ending doom
So, till the judgment that yourself arise,
You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes.
To be, or not to be, that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,

--*Hamlet* III, i, 56-58.

Macbeth: I have done the deed. Didst thou not hear a noise?
Lady M: I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry.
Did not you speak?
Macbeth: When?
Lady M: Now.
Macbeth: As I descended?
Lady M: Ay.

--*Macbeth* II, ii, 14-17.
Lesson 27: Collage Poem

Purpose: To create a new poem and appreciate the choices poets make; to learn to work as a group.

Preparatory Lesson: None specifically, however it is best if the class has an opportunity to meet in the library to learn first-hand where the poetry anthologies are filed, what kinds of poetry anthologies are available, and especially, what indexes to poetry are available.

Time Required: At least four days for the entire collage poem.

Equipment Required: Poetry anthologies.

Objective: The student will research poems linked thematically and create an original poem based upon that research. He or she will make aesthetic and poetic judgements, thereby understanding better the poet's task. The student will gain experience working with a group on a creative effort.

Description: Begin by asking the class to close their eyes and imagine a box in front of each of them. Instruct them to open this imaginary box and look at whatever is inside. Once they have seen whatever it is in their mind's eye, they are to open their eyes and write spontaneously and continuously about it for three minutes. Ask them to brainstorm with the object, listing everything that object brings to mind. Once they have their lists, they should circle things on it that seem interesting; if they can connect some of the circled things with a theme or larger association, they write that at the top of the paper.

Divide the students into groups, no more than three to a group. Instruct them that they are to create a collage poem around a single theme. The lists they have created are meant only as springboards for themes; the theme for the collage poem does not have to have come from the list. The collage poem will be made up of lines, phrases, or even
single words taken from existing poems that somehow relate to the theme. Each member of the group must contribute at least one line or phrase that he or she has found. Students may add original lines, if necessary, but all of the separate parts must be integrated together into a new poem.

Give students the rest of the class period and at least one subsequent class period to work on this with their partners. The completed collage poems should be due in at least four days, complete with annotations providing sources for all the poem's component parts. Use the opportunity to remind students about plagiarism. (Feinberg 168-169)

Notes: Give the students at least a week to work on this project.

On the day the collage poems are due, the groups may read them to the class as a whole or move on to the next exercise, Visual Collage Poem.

An additional stipulation that my classes found quite illuminating was to require that at least one part of the collage poem must come from a non-English-speaking poet. They found that the different perspective a foreign author brings to his writing helped their collage poems a great deal.
**Collage Poem Example:**

"Black and Blue" (Feinberg, 170)

They said you have a blue guitar
Smeared a bluish-green
And stroked all night, with a black wing,
my black wing
But a sky is blue
a wild blue
with a blue smell of starch
And sometimes it has nothing but
blackness above
And the sight is as black as doom

"The Man with a Blue Guitar"
--Wallace Stevens

"Drawing by Ronnie c, Grade one"
--Ruth Lechlitner

"Ego" --Philip Booth

"Caliban In The Coal Mines"
--Louis Untermeyer

"Remember Through The Telescope Extend"
--George Dillon
Lesson 28: Visual Collage Poem

Purpose: To represent a poem visually.

Preparatory Lessons: Haiku Poster, Collage Poem

Time Required: At least one class period for students to work in class, and another class period to present the work. Whether as homework or in class, students need at least three days to complete their presentations.

Equipment Required: Paper, markers, crayons, other art supplies.

Objective: The student will analyze the collage poem created by his or her group previously, focusing especially on the imagery and thematic content of the poem. He or she will create an original visual art work based upon that analysis. The student will also gain facility working with a group.

Description: In a continuation of work begun in Collage Poem lesson, each student groups will make a visual display of its collage poem. The requirements are that the complete poem must be typed, printed, or written out; and the original source for each component part of the collage poem must be cited in some fashion.

After the assignment is explained, but before the students begin working on their presentations, discuss as a class or within groups the wide range of options available. A visual presentation can be much more than making a poster. Sculptures, mobiles, or slide presentations are all acceptable alternatives. Point out that the choice of medium can make a statement related to the theme of the collage poem. A group with "Music" as the theme of their collage poem, for example, could write the poem on, and coming out of, a model piano they have built.

When the projects are due, display them all in the classroom and give each group time to explain the artistic choices they made. As a class, discuss the different approaches used, the ideas behind those choices, and any new understanding of the poem
gained by visually presenting it.

Notes: If students are having a hard time understanding the options available to them, ask them to imagine that they have to visually depict poems about the following subjects: television, flying, fears, and cities. What kind of visual presentation seems appropriate for each subject? Would they draw pictures of their own or find existing pictures? What kinds of pictures would they use? Paintings? Newspaper photos? Would they illustrate each separate component of the poem, or focus on an overall theme?

The requirement that all citations be provided offers a good opportunity to remind students about plagiarism.
Lesson 29: Dramatic Collage Poem

Purpose: To have students perform their collage poems, providing an opportunity for them to apply the dramatic skills and creativity they have developed.

Preparatory Lesson: Collage Poem, Visual Collage Poem, plus Choral Reading exercise.

Time Required: At least a week should be given for students to plan and rehearse. Two class periods, at a minimum, should be used for in-class work before the final presentations.

Equipment Required: None.

Objective: The student will analyze the collage poem created by his or her group previously as an oral and dramatic performance text. With his or her group, the student will create an original performance based upon this analysis. The student will apply the drama skills developed in earlier lessons.

Description: Having written a collage poem and visually presented it, each group is required to present it dramatically. The only requirements are that the entire poem must be performed, and each member of the group must participate, saying some part of the whole poem. Explain that, as with the visual presentation, the artistic and dramatic choices each group makes will affect how the poem is perceived by the audience. Suggest that groups should consider how their manner of presentation can reflect upon the theme of their poem.

On the day of the performances, after all presentations are complete, spend the rest of the period having the class discuss their reactions to the other performances, the decisions they each made for their performance, and how their perception of their poem has been changed by the dramatic work. (Feinberg 168-170)

Notes: A writing assignment can be given in conjunction with this lesson: have
the students write a letter explaining the creative process they went through from the creation of the collage poem to the dramatic performance; it should also include reactions to the overall endeavor, and suggestions for improvement. This assignment not only requires the student to evaluate his or her own work, but also provides feedback for the teacher refining the lesson.
Lesson 30: Final Project

Purpose: To integrate students' knowledge of poetry, their drama skills, and their own creativity into an original performance piece.

Preparatory Lesson: Give the students a copy of John Ciardi's analysis of "Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening" from How Does a Poem Mean? (6-12). Read it out loud to the class. Have the students act out the poem as Ciardi discusses it; he treats it as a three-act play, after all. Afterwards, discuss the process by which Ciardi looks at the poem—in effect, recreating how Frost might have composed the poem in the first place. Discuss Ciardi's idea of focusing on "how" rather than "why" a poem means what it does.

Time Required: At least a week.

Equipment Required: None.

Objective: The student will create an original performance explicating a poem of the student's choice, demonstrating his or her mastery of the dramatic, creative, and analytical skills developed in earlier lessons.

Description: For the culminating lesson of their study of poetry, the students will create and perform original dramas showing the creation of a poem. As in the collage poem lessons, the students will work in groups of no more than three. For this project, though, the poem on which they focus will be an existing one, rather than one they have created themselves. Suggest that the groups use the following steps as they prepare their presentation:

1) Each member of the group takes a poem he or she finds intriguing or appealing and makes copies for the other members of the group. The group picks one of the poems to use.

2) As a group, students research their poet and read other poems by him or her.
3) Based on the research of the poet, students create a Poem Prologue of their chosen poem. Instead of inventing any scene as a prologue to the poem, however, the group invents the scene they imagine the poet had in his or mind.

4) Each group prepares a Color Commentary of the poem, examining any changes of tone, mood, or thought.

5) Using their knowledge of "how" a poem means, each group agrees on a metaphor that seems appropriate to the creative process of this poem. Is the poet like a sculptor, chipping away, uncovering and revealing the poem? Is the poet an explorer, discovering new levels of the poem as he or she writes it? Or is he or she more like a house-builder, making designs, planning, building a foundation and adding on until the house is complete?

6) Through improvisation or scripting, each group develops their scene, metaphorically showing how the poet created this poem.

7) Scenes are presented to the class as a whole.

After all the scenes are presented, give the students plenty of time to discuss their reactions to the other performances. Ask them to talk about how their view of their poem grew as they worked on this project.

Example: A group studies "Ozymandias", and decides to represent Shelley's writing of it in terms of the raising of a memorial statue. A workman in a quarry represents Shelley finding inspiration for his poem; the arduous journey transporting the block of granite to the site is Shelley first musing about the specifics of the poem in his mind. The chalk lines the sculptor makes on the granite are the metrical structure and rhyme scheme Shelley has decided to follow. The first chisel cuts on the rough figure become the imagery Shelley has in mind; the artisan's fine detail work and polishing that make the statue a memorial are the subtle decisions of word choice, imagery, and alliteration with which Shelley refines his poem. Finally, the ceremony in which the statue is placed on its
pedestal is that moment when Shelley titles his poem and completes it.

Notes: This project draws on skills the students have developed throughout this study of poetry. The emphasis is not only on analyzing a poem, but communicating that analysis through a creative means. If groups are having a difficult time analyzing or finding inspiration, have them repeat lessons like Word Association, Seurat Poem or I am the Poem using their poem. An additional recommendation for groups that are having a difficult time, is to have them work with a poem of which earlier versions are available for comparison. An early draft of Keats' "The Eve of St. Agnes" is reprinted in Ciardi and Williams' How Does a Poem Mean? (111-113); both volumes of The Norton Anthology of English Literature feature "Poems in Process" (I: 2507-2517, II: 2513-2533).

A writing assignment can be given in conjunction with this lesson: have the students keep a journal of their work on the project and turn it in with a copy of the final script of their performance.
Evaluation of Creative Drama Lessons
Utilized in the Classroom

The creative drama lessons presented in this paper are intended as a whole poetry unit. As stated earlier, however, the inspiration for these lessons came from efforts in the 9th and 10th grade English classes at the Punahou Academy, most of which have been adapted into these lessons. Therefore, the evaluation in this chapter is focused primarily upon the Collage Poem exercises, having been used the most in actual classroom settings.

The student visual presentations, for the most part, were imaginative and interesting; the students made real efforts to integrate the visual art of their presentations with the creative art of their collage poems. One group, for example, creating a collage poem on the theme "Insanity," covered a piece of posterboard with demented drawings, chaotically intermixed with splashes of red, black, and gray paint. The text of the collage poem was scrawled on the poster in spattered ink, creating a visual effect that was as sinister and insane as the poem itself. It developed that virtually every student group working on a collage poem had at least one budding artist in their ranks who, even if he or she had provided minimal input on the creation of the collage poem, was enthusiastically willing to visually present the work. As class discussions and evaluations proved, this had the added benefit that every student felt he or she had been an active participant in the group work.

When model examples were given to students, their subsequent visual presentations became more innovative. During the first semester at Punahou in which the collage poem exercise was utilized, student groups all made posters illustrating their collage poems. The second semester students had the benefit of the first semester classes' work as
models. Seeing the variety of approaches available with a poster presentation, many students sought an even wider range of artistic options, creating mobiles or sculptures upon which the collage poem was written. Discussions held with all classes to evaluate student response to the project confirmed that students found the models useful and felt challenged to make more individual and original choices in their visual presentations.

The dramatic presentations were less successful. With two exceptions, all of the groups' performances were marked by timidity and an unwillingness to perform more than the literal image of each line. Little or no effort was made to thematically focus the entire drama. The two exceptions to this observation were groups led by students who had previous experience in drama, having performed in plays earlier that year and in years past. Far too few of the other students had any familiarity with drama and performing, despite this teacher's earlier efforts. The lessons in this paper correct that deficiency; the Dramatic Collage Poem performance has been made one of the culminating projects of the lessons. Before they are called upon to create an original performance as challenging as the Dramatic Collage Poem, the students will have had experience improvising and working with their peers and gaining confidence in their own ability to perform dramatically.

To build that confidence, it is intended that the lessons be followed in the order given. If taught consecutively they form an entire poetry unit approximately six weeks in length. The bulk of the lessons comprise the first three weeks; the Collage Poem exercises together take a week and a half to complete, while the Final Project itself encompasses a week and a half of class time. These lessons are flexible enough, however, that they can be incorporated into an existing curriculum. Instead of devoting six intensive weeks to poetry, a teacher can intersperse these lessons with the regular English classwork. In this way, the study of poetry using drama can be sustained over an entire semester or a year.
If the poetry lessons are utilized in this way, however, it is recommended that the order still be followed; later lessons build on students' mastery of skills such as improvisation and dialogue-writing that have been introduced earlier. Of course, the structure of the lessons is not meant to be absolutely rigid or confining. It is expected that a teacher can and will adapt these lessons to the needs of the specific classroom. Nevertheless, small groups of lessons can be utilized as separate units, each focusing on a specific area of poetry. These are:

**Sound Device Unit:**
- Spell-Making
- Tongue Twisters
- I am the Consonant

**Poetic Structure Unit:**
- Seurat Painting/Seurat Poem
- Jigsaw Poem

**Meter/Rhythm Unit:**
- Metronomic Poetry
- Marching Meter
- Living Line

However these lessons are taught, for them to be effective creative drama must be made an ongoing part of the classroom experience. The focus on poetry can be a short unit during a single part of the year; the drama cannot. Research, and my own personal experience, indicates that any effective use of drama as an educational tool in the classroom depends upon the creation of an environment in which drama is accepted and used. The teacher must utilize drama throughout the school year. Creative drama as a method of teaching is validated further in the student's mind each time it is used. Instead of being an unusual occurrence, dramatic involvement with the text becomes an accepted
norm. This does not require major adjustments in the classroom. As Brian Way says in Development through Drama:

...in drama the five-minute lesson can be as important as the longer one, and its place on the timetable governed as much by factors of human need as of academic necessity—a few minutes active drama can do much for tired, strained and possibly bored minds. So drama need never interfere with crowded curricula; it is a way of education in the fullest sense; it is a way of living and, as such, aids rather than interferes with other study and achievement. (19)

Creative drama provides greater opportunity for students to respond to texts in a personal way. Many students, especially adolescents, have difficulty making an emotional connection to a work of literature. It is even harder for them to share that connection once it is made. Peer pressure and fear of ridicule keep many students silent during class discussions. As performers, though, students are given the freedom to express themselves in a different and "safer" way. A boy who breaks down and cries while performing the part of Ralph in a Lord of the Flies improvisation, for example, is commended by his peers for his acting ability. They do not ridicule him for crying. It was Ralph who cried, after all, not the boy. But having seen a real human being cry, even while playing a role, the rest of the class has made a connection with the fictional character Ralph that they might never have made in a regular class discussion. Through drama, they have been exposed to the "universal" for which Dorothy Heathcote strives, and which makes literature so potent.

The lessons presented in this paper are designed so that students make personal connections with poetry. To clarify those connections, and to facilitate self-evaluation, students should write regularly about their responses to the creative drama lessons. This writing, along with the evaluative discussions held at the end of each class and the teacher's personal observations, provide useful feedback to the teacher. He or she can
evaluate better both student development and the lessons themselves.

As stated earlier, several of the poetry lessons in this paper have been tested in classroom settings. Student responses to the lessons indicate that they found the creative drama approach useful as they learned poetry. Many students wrote that they found the experience "not only educational but fun." As one said:

Most importantly, this assignment was educational. Because we had to read and analyze poems, there was no way that we could escape learning. Just by reading poems we were "learning" because the first step to learning something is experiencing it or acknowledging that it exists....I, and I hope the rest of the class, learned about poetry and poetic styles just by reading and analyzing the poems that we did. In looking for these things in our poems, I learned about meter and rhyme scheme as well as alliteration, personification, similes, metaphors and all the rest of the devices that poets use. Because we were almost "forced" to compose and act out our own poems (if we wanted a decent grade) we experienced what it is like to actually write and act out poetry. By doing this assignment I also learned to work together with others in a group and to be more responsible.

Some students found the assignments confusing or vague. "Just expressing ideas that 'illustrate' a theme is too general of a statement to be an assignment," one student responded. This same student, however, went on to say that because of these generalities he was forced to ask himself: "Do the themes about bells have to relate to the usage of bells, the connotation of bells, or the characteristics of what a bell does and how it does it?" While he meant those questions as complaints, I was delighted that he asked those questions at all, especially since he was a student who academically took a very passive view of class. In his case, and with the others who were similarly unsure of how to approach this assignment, it was necessary to meet the students in individual conferences. However, because the students themselves were directing so much of their own classwork each period, it was not difficult to find time to meet with the students who
needed extra help; often the time for conferences was available in class while the other student groups were working on their individual projects.

Students learn and respond well when poetry is taught using creative drama lessons. The classes with whom these lessons were used genuinely enjoyed the change of pace and took pride in their visual and dramatic presentations. As an added benefit, even after the poetry unit was concluded, students remained receptive to lessons utilizing creative drama techniques. They showed much more willingness to perform dramatically in class than they did when the semester began. When performances were incorporated into other English lessons, the feedback given to the performers of in-class scenes became much more specific. Instead of unsubstantial comments like "It was good; I liked it," the student responses were on the order of, "I liked the way Oedipus moved around Teiresias; it showed how impatient he was."

These lessons are not intended to supplant existing methods of teaching poetry. But as a supplement to any English class, creative drama lessons bring a perspective and a challenge to students that is effective and positive. They encourage students to become personally involved in a text, using it and exploring it as a means to understanding themselves.
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