

## READING POEMS ALOUD: SOUND AND MEANING



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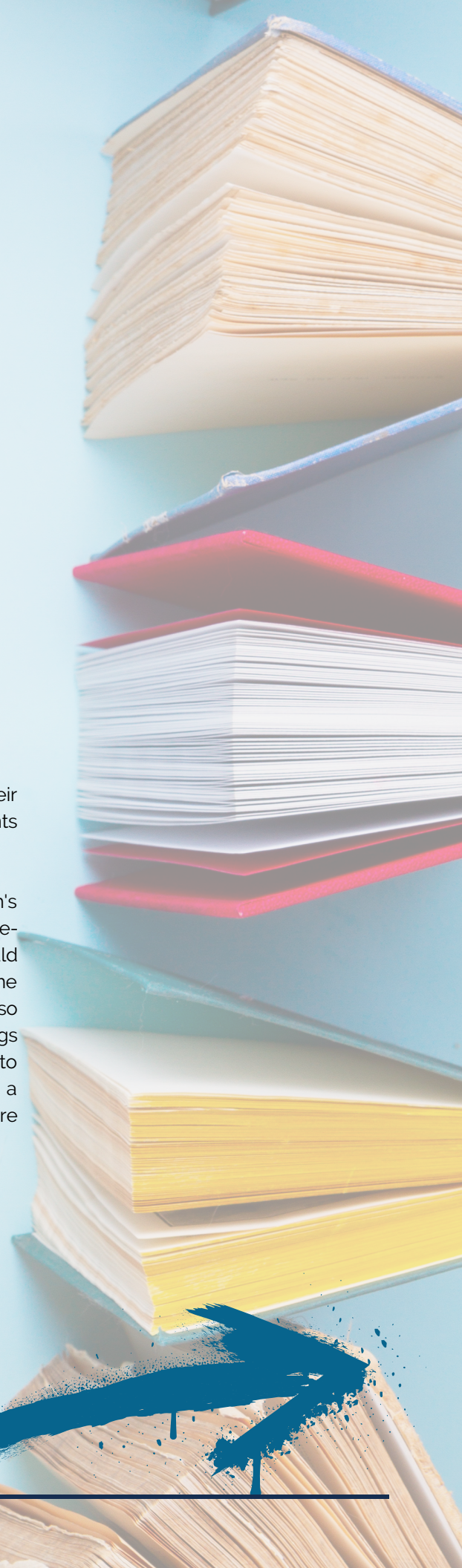


# Outcomes

For a midpoint lesson in a unit on poetry, the students, through their reading aloud and listening to various poems, will consider the elements involved in reading poetry aloud.

As a musical score gives direction to the player of an instrument, a poem's arrangement on the page gives direction to the reader of a poem. Line-breaks and punctuation in poems offer cues about the way a poem should be read aloud — commas are short breaths, periods longer beats. Some poets pause lightly at line-breaks, others do not. Reading aloud is also driven by cadences in the language — monosyllabic words slow things down, long words extend lines. (You may or may not decide to demonstrate this notion of a poem's "score" by reading a few lines or a poem to the students — first in a clunky way and then following the more natural rhythms or the sentences and phrases struck across the lines

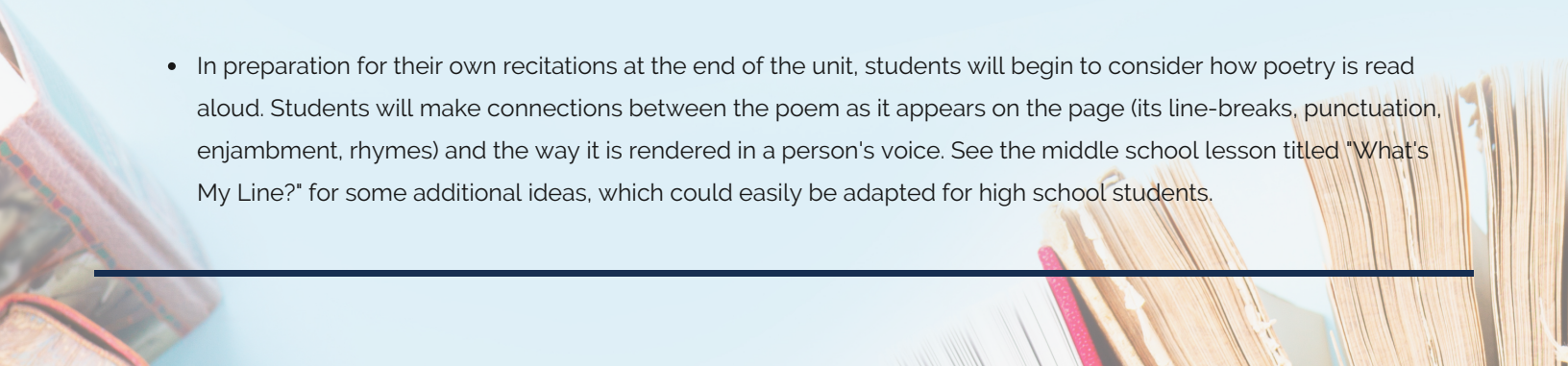
*Based on a lesson by Holly Bugoni (Hyde School, Woodstock, CT), Michalene Hague (Veterans Memorial High School, Peabody, MA), Margaret LaRaia (Needham High School, Needham, MA) and Jenny LaVigne (Chelsea High School, Chelsea, MA)*







# Ideas and Methodologies

- It may be a good idea to begin or end the lesson by listening to a few recordings of poets reading poems (there is lots of good audio available on the Academy of American Poets website — [www.poets.org](http://www.poets.org) — and several audio anthologies available at book stores). The lesson may also begin, or end, with students listening to some of the Favorite Poem Project participants reading poems aloud; you may choose to show the full video clips or to simply play the sound from some of the readings.
  - During this lesson, students will listen to a few poems read two to four times, each time by a separate student in class. It's a good idea to present at least one poem that uses end-line rhymes, and at least one that doesn't. The lesson may provide the opportunity to discuss different poetic forms as well. The teacher may choose to offer a formal poem, such as Elizabeth Bishop's villanelle "One Art," alongside a free verse poem written in short lines, such as "Pot Roast" by Mark Strand; or two fourteen-line poems — a Shakespearean sonnet, paired with Robert Hayden's unrhymed sonnet "Those Winter Sundays.").
  - Students will begin to observe that when a poem is read aloud, choices the reader makes (in tone of voice, emphasis, breaths and pauses) can affect the listener's understanding of the poem. The readers will leave the classroom so that they are not influenced by one another's readings. Each reader will be given a copy of the chosen poem to practice in the hall. You should let them know that they're guinea pigs and should be open to hearing the class comment on their reading in a collegial way.
  - The remaining students will receive four copies of the chosen poem. The teacher will show them the process of notation, using a poem other than the one(s) chosen for the readers. The teacher will read the poem and model the notation process on an overhead projector. One reader will be called into the classroom to read the poem only once. Students will note as much as they can on their copy of the poem.
  - After reading the poem students will record what general feeling they associate with the reading. The class will then include the reader in a discussion of how the poem was delivered and how the reading promoted or detracted from students' hearing and understanding the poem. No student should feel as if he or she has somehow failed to read the poem well; if he or she does, offer a chance to read it again after the class discussion. After hearing different readings of different poems, students will write reflections on what the poems mean to them (for homework or in class).
  - In preparation for their own recitations at the end of the unit, students will begin to consider how poetry is read aloud. Students will make connections between the poem as it appears on the page (its line-breaks, punctuation, enjambment, rhymes) and the way it is rendered in a person's voice. See the middle school lesson titled "What's My Line?" for some additional ideas, which could easily be adapted for high school students.
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# Lesson Resources

## Suggested poems from Americans' Favorite Poems:

"Naming of Parts" by Henry Reed  
"My Papa's Waltz" or "The Waking" by Theodore Roethke  
"One Art" by Elizabeth Bishop  
"Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" by Dylan Thomas  
"The Waking" by Theodore Roethke  
"Merry Go Round" by Langston Hughes  
"Sonnet 29" by William Shakespeare  
"Acquainted with the Night" by Robert Frost  
"We Wear the Mask" by Paul Laurence Dunbar  
"Mid-Term Break" by Seamus Heaney  
"The Snow Man" by Wallace Stevens  
"Those Winter Sundays" by Robert Hayden  
"Mansion" by A.R. Ammons  
"The Bean Eaters" by Gwendolyn Brooks  
"The Rain" by Robert Creeley  
"The Bee" by James Dickey  
"The Pebble" by Zbigniew Herbert  
"Strawberries" by W.S. Merwin  
"The Night Dances" or "Polly's Tree" by Sylvia Plath  
"Pot Roast" by Mark Strand  
"My Fly" by C.K. Williams  
"The Moon Sails Out" by Federico Garcia Lorca (a poem with  
wonderfully textured  
lines, even in translation)

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