

SEEKING POEMS, SHARING
CONNECTIONS PART IV:
WHAT IS POETRY?



LESSON PLANS | EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES | VIDEOS | POETRY

THE FAVORITE POEM PROJECT IS DEDICATED TO CELEBRATING, DOCUMENTING
AND ENCOURAGING POETRY'S ROLE IN OUR LIVES. **FOR MORE LESSON PLANS
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Outcomes

In an introductory lesson to a unit on poetry, students will consider, both as a class and individually, what they like or dislike in poetry.

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

- The poems listed on the "lesson resources" page offer some challenges to a narrow definition of poetry — most of them are unrhymed free verse poems with varying line lengths. The teacher will read at least one of these poems to the class as an opening for student discussion on how the poem differs from, or corresponds to, the students' expectations of poetry.
 - After the reading, give students copies of the poem, so they can see the shape it takes on the page. Students will also identify what elements of the poem they like or dislike.
 - After a preliminary discussion, students will go to the library with the assignment of finding a poem that appeals to them. In addition to setting aside various poetry anthologies, there will be a folder of poems the teacher has selected for students to consider if they choose.
 - Once students have picked their poems, they must write out the poems by hand twice, as a way of familiarizing themselves with the language. As a homework assignment they will each write a reflection on why they like their chosen poem — what in particular makes it a good poem, what in it speaks directly to them. In a subsequent class, each student will read his or her poem aloud and will offer some thoughts on it.
 - It's a good idea to ask students to have only the text of the poem in front of them for their class presentation. That way, their reflection will be natural — they'll be talking to each other about poetry rather than assuming a book-report style monotone. Of course, they will turn in what they've written, but they need not simply read it out to the class.
 - As a model for the assignment, students will watch one or all of the following Favorite Poem Project Videos:
 - "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" by Emily Dickinson
 - Read by Yina Liang, Student, Decatur, GA
 - "Minstrel Man" by Langston Hughes
 - Read by Pov Chin, Student, Stockton, CA
 - "Nick and the Candlestick" by Sylvia Plath
 - Read by Seph Rodney, Photographer, Long Beach, CA
 - Over the next week, a few students (3-6) will read and explain their chosen poems each day. Part of the class period will be devoted to the presentations.
 - The readings will be used as a discussion starter, and students will develop a list of words, phrases and ideas that come in handy when discussing poetry. Expanding on their intuitive sense of poetic tools, students will begin to learn the names for those tools. The teacher may offer some particular terms.
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Lesson Resources

Poems (suggestions from *Americans' Favorite Poems*):

"Mansion" by A.R. Ammons

"The Bean Eaters" by Gwendolyn Brooks

"Jabberwocky" by Lewis Carroll

"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

"My Papa's Waltz" by Theodore Roethke

"The Snow Man" by Wallace Stevens

"Pot Roast" by Mark Strand

"My Fly" by C.K. Williams



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