



Reading Poems Aloud: Sound and Meaning

Recommended Grade Range: High School

Learning Objective(s)

Students will be able to...

- ✓ Consider the elements involved in reading poetry aloud.
- ✓ Practice reading a poem aloud with attention to breath, punctuation, and line breaks.

Lesson Agenda

Do Now

Begin class by playing a few poems out loud--ideally read in the voice of the poet themselves, depending on time period/technology constraints. It's also a good idea to present at least one poem that uses end-line rhymes, and at least one that doesn't, so students can hear the difference in musicality.

- ◆ You may wish to utilize the audio available on the Academy of American Poets website (www.poets.org) or the several audio anthologies available at bookstores.
- ◆ You could also select videos of Favorite Poem Project participants reading poems aloud; you might choose to show the full video clips or to simply play the sound from some of the readings.

Share Out

Discuss, in small groups or as a whole class, initial noticings about how each poet read their poem aloud. Consider any of the following:

- ◆ How did the poet utilize pauses/breath in reading? When did they slow down, and when did they speed up?
 - ◆ How did the poet distinguish between periods, commas, em-dashes, semi-colons, etc.?
- ◆ Could you hear any line breaks in their reading? Where do you predict some of the line breaks to be? (Potential extension: Compare your predictions to the poem on the page and see if you're correct!)

Mini Lesson

Select 2-3 student volunteers to read a (new) poem for the class. When selecting students, you should let them know that they're "guinea pigs" for this activity, and should be open to hearing the class comment on their reading in a collegial way.

- ◆ The 2-3 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 on their own.



- ◆ The remaining students will receive 3 (if 2 readers) or 4 (if 3 readers) copies of the chosen poem, to read silently to themselves.
 - ◆ You might direct them to annotate any places they predict readers may emphasize in their readings, or you may wish to focus on annotation of themes or literary devices.
- ◆ After a few minutes, call one reader into the room to read the poem just 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 of 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.
- ◆ Repeat this process with the remaining 1-2 readers.

Closing

After hearing different readings of different poems, students will write reflections on what the poems mean to them, and/or how sound functions in the poem (for homework or in class, to be shared with their peers).

Suggestions for Next Steps

- ◆ This lesson could be a launch activity for a recitation unit; in preparing for their own recitations at the end of the unit, students will begin to consider how poetry is read aloud.
- ◆ In future lessons, students could 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 additional ideas, which could easily be adapted for high school students.

Lesson Resources

The following FPP videos are particularly well-suited to this lesson:

- "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)

The Favorite Poem Project is a nonprofit organization dedicated to celebrating, documenting, and encouraging poetry's role in our lives.



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