

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS LESSON PLAN

Lesson: Apple Poetry

Coordination with ELA Frameworks
(shaded areas represent areas covered in lesson)

Level 9: 11-12+

Reading	Writing	Oral Communication	Critical Thinking
Refinement of comprehension strategies	Recognize more errors independently	Ask for clarification of oral comments & directions	Use appropriate tools to express ideas & opinions
Strategic reading	Revise to include more details & information	Follow complex oral directions	Distinguish between fact & opinion
Automatic word recognition	Write at greater length in response to a topic or question	Give directions orally	Distinguish between fact & fiction
Advanced phonological awareness	Recognize and use appropriate formats & genres	Summarize events orally	Use appropriate tools for gathering information
Increased decoding ability	Select writing topics independently	Communicate complex ideas clearly	Recognize that there is not always a "right" answer
Recognize a variety of genres & styles	Acquire more organizational strategies	Restate ideas in order to clarify meaning	Recognize how medium affects message
Interpret charts & graphs	Write for a specific, identified audience	Participate effectively in structured types of conversation (interviews, etc.)	Separate response to message from response to speaker/medium
	Awareness & control of tone & style	Address sensitive topics appropriately	
	Use figurative language		
	Evaluate own written work		

APPLE POETRY

This lesson is designed as an introduction to poetry, one of the aspects of writing included in the scope and sequence of the Writing class at the Community Learning Center. I use this lesson, adapted from Frances E. Kazemek and Pat Rigg's *Enriching our Lives: Poetry Lessons for Adult Literacy Teachers and Tutors* (International Reading Association, 1995) because the concrete nature of the teaching allows students to glimpse both the construction and the power of imagery latent in even the most common objects and experiences.

Learning Objectives: By the end of the lesson, students will:

- Discuss the difference between imagery and reality
- Identify some characteristics of poetry as opposed to prose (rhyme, line breaks, grammatical freedom, etc.)
- Review differences between literal and figurative language
- Produce group and individual poems that demonstrate what they have learned

Instructional strategies: During the lesson, students will use a variety of learning strategies:

- Listening and speaking: students will share memories and experiences in pairs, and will listen to the teacher read the poem for meaning (engaging interpersonal intelligence, and activating prior experiences for reflection), and speak a few lines to experience the language and meter
- Hands-on, concrete activity: students will handle and cut an apple, engaging kinesthetic, naturalist, and spatial intelligences. They will make in reality the image in the poem.
- Pair and whole-group discussion: students will share experiences in pairs and brainstorm with the whole group, engaging interpersonal intelligences and stimulating each other's imaginations.
- Brainstorming: this technique demonstrates to students the power both of cooperation and of thinking before beginning to write. It emphasizes the importance of pre-writing activities, even in what we think of as "creative" as opposed to "school" writing.
- Writing a group poem: working together engages the interpersonal intelligence and defuses the intimidation many students feel when asked to write a poem. The poem is a model of what will be expected of individuals. It raises many questions which can be answered in advance, freeing students to work on their individual poems with greater confidence.
- Writing individual poems: students produce works of considerable meaning and beauty during this activity. This is a boost to their confidence as writers and enables them to better understand what goes into writing poetry. Although they may not be aware of it, both this activity and the previous one require them to exercise critical thinking as they reflect on the complex problem of what they wish to communicate and the best way of saying it.
- Sharing poems: in a safe sharing environment, students get a boost of confidence as their classmates appreciate what they have written. Students learn to appreciate the viewpoints and talents of their classmates.

The Lesson

Time: approximately 90 minutes

Materials: one apple (preferably Delicious variety), one napkin or paper towel, and one knife per student; copies of "The Apple" by Bruce Guernsey

Pass out apples, napkins and knives so each student has one of each. Ask students to think back to experiences they have had with apples. After a moment, indicate pairs and ask them to share their memories with each other. Tell them they will have 5 minutes for this sharing.

Write on the board the last six lines of "The Apple":

Quartered,
a seed rocks
in each tiny cradle.

Like blood,
in the air an apple
rusts.

Read the lines once, wait a few seconds, and then read them again. Ask students to read the lines with you, to get the feel of the words in their mouth.

Ask students to consider the first three lines written on the board. What picture is the author presenting? Can they cut their apples to make the picture? Give students time to do this – probably all will cut the apple appropriately. Tell them this is what imagery is – an author's effort to paint a picture in the reader's mind. This image presents a concrete picture that tells students how to cut their apples. This is the **literal** meaning of the image. However, what does the author's words suggest? How many times have we seen or actually cut apples in this way? And how many times have we seen them as cradles rocking seeds? This is the power of poetry, to take something ordinary, something we have seen an uncountable number of times, and yet give us a new way of seeing it. Now, what does that new way suggest? What is implied in this image? Allow students time to suggest the various relationships that are implied: the apple nurtures the seed; the apple is the parent, the seed the child; the seed is new life...and so on. Explain to students that this is the **figurative** meaning of the image – that none of these things are spoken directly, but all are implied by the words the author uses to paint the picture.

Move on to the next three lines. Ask students what these lines mean. Why blood? Why rust? Why make this comparison with an apple? (This is the point which demonstrates why Delicious apples are the best choice to use – they oxidize and turn brown more rapidly than other varieties. Once again, students can see in reality the image the author is painting in words.) Return again to a discussion of literal and figurative.

When this discussion is complete, read the entire poem, and discuss it to the extent time permits.

Now tell students that they are going to write poems about apples. First the class will write one together, and then each student will produce an individual poem. Brainstorm for characteristics of apples, sayings, memories, things that are made out of apples, what you can do with or about apples – whatever you or students think of. The more, the better!

Then decide – either arbitrarily or getting a sense of the group – on a theme for a poem and write one on the board as a group, allowing students to add, subtract, suggest, ask questions, debate and finally agree on a poem. It is not necessary that everyone agree – disagreement can be equally productive of learning in this case, as long as the personal, experiential nature of poetry is emphasized. All but one person in the group may want to express something one way; the lone dissenter can be praised as an original. There are endless opportunities for affirmation in a discussion of this sort. Questions about rhyme, line breaks, grammar and other matters will be raised during this process, and their answers will allow students to approach writing their own poems with more confidence.

Finally have students write their own poems individually. Let them know they will be asked to share their work with the group if they feel able to. Circulate to observe and offer help as requested or as apparently needed. Students will often write from margin to margin as in prose, and will need reminding of poetry's shorter lines, and perhaps help in deciding where line breaks should go. They may also write prosaically, and may need help leaving a word or two out to make more poetic language.

The last step in this lesson is called a "read-around." Rules for this are the same as apply to any sharing in the class, and should be made explicit and rigorously enforced to ensure a sense of safety among the students.

- 1) Only positive feedback is allowed. Listeners can comment on what they like about what their classmates write. Anything negative they keep to themselves.
- 2) Readers are not allowed to apologize for or otherwise minimize what they have written or for their courage in sharing it. No remarks like, "I'm not much of a writer but I tried," or, "I know this isn't very good." Just read.
- 3) Readers may make only one response to positive feedback: "Thank you." Again, no remarks like, "Did you really like it? I thought it was pretty lame." Courage and effort are not to be minimized.

The lesson can end with a review the learning that has taken place, reminding students of the meanings of vocabulary such as imagery, literal, figurative, and so on. Students may also want to discuss and reflect on the experience itself, which most will have felt to be extremely positive.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS LESSON PLAN

Lesson: Skinny Poems

Coordination with ELA Frameworks
(shaded areas represent areas covered in lesson)

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Automatic word recognition	Write at greater length in response to a topic or question	Give directions orally	Distinguish between fact & fiction
Advanced phonological awareness	Recognize and use appropriate formats & genres	Summarize events orally	Use appropriate tools for gathering information
Increased decoding ability	Select writing topics independently	Communicate complex ideas clearly	Recognize that there is not always a "right" answer
Recognize a variety of genres & styles	Acquire more organizational strategies	Restate ideas in order to clarify meaning	Recognize how medium affects message
Interpret charts & graphs	Write for a specific, identified audience	Participate effectively in structured types of conversation (interviews, etc.)	Separate response to message from response to speaker/medium
	Awareness & control of tone & style	Address sensitive topics appropriately	
	Use figurative language		
	Evaluate own written work		

SKINNY POEMS

The mechanics of writing short lines of poetry often pose a problem for students, who are used to writing margin-to-margin in prose. Writing "skinny poems" with one word per line makes the concept of short lines clear and gives students practice in producing them. It also makes concrete a relationship between a poem and the object it is written about, and gives students practice in using flexible thinking to view an object from more than perspective.

Learning Objectives: By the end of the lesson, students will:

- Discuss the layout of poetry on the page and what it suggests about a poem's meaning
- Identify different perspectives (personal, social, aesthetic, etc.) from which objects may be viewed
- Review differences between literal and figurative language
- Produce group and individual poems that demonstrate what they have learned.

Instructional strategies: During the lesson, students will use a variety of learning strategies:

- Listening and speaking: students will share memories and experiences in pairs, and will listen to the teacher read the poem for meaning (engaging interpersonal intelligence, and activating prior experiences for reflection)
- Hands-on, concrete activity: students will handle various thin objects, engaging kinesthetic and spatial intelligences. They will use these experiences as the concrete basis for the abstractions in their poems.
- Pair and whole-group discussion: students will share experiences in pairs and brainstorm with the whole group, engaging interpersonal intelligences and stimulating each other's imaginations.
- Brainstorming: this technique demonstrates to students the power both of cooperation and of thinking before beginning to write. It emphasizes the importance of pre-writing activities, even in what we think of as "creative" as opposed to "school" writing.
- Writing a group poem: working together engages the interpersonal intelligence and serves to defuse the intimidation most students feel when asked to write a poem. It produces a model of what will be expected of individuals and gives students experience with what is wanted. It raises many questions which can be answered in advance, freeing students to work on their individual poems with greater confidence.
- Writing individual poems: students produce works of considerable meaning and beauty during this activity. This is a boost to their confidence as writers and enables them to better understand what goes into writing poetry. Although they may not be aware of it, both this activity and the previous one require them to exercise critical thinking as they reflect on what they wish to communicate and evaluate the means for doing so. These are both complex problem-solving activities, requiring students to consider carefully what they want to say and to make continual judgments about the best way of saying it.
- Sharing poems: in a safe sharing environment, students get a boost of confidence as their classmates appreciate what they have written. Students learn to appreciate the viewpoints and talents of their classmates.

The Lesson

Time: 90 minutes

Materials:

- various thin objects – pens, pencils, lined paper, knives, rulers, chalk, string, wire – anything that might be called “skinny”
- copies of “Skinny Poem” by Lou Lipsitz (can be found in *Poetry in Three Dimensions: Reading, Writing and Critical Thinking through Poetry, Book One* by Carol Clark and Alison Draper, Educators Publishing Service, 2001)

Pass out the various objects, telling students to handle them and pass them around. Ask for suggestions for other things that could be called skinny. Ask them to reflect back on any experiences or memories these objects suggest. After a moment, indicate pairs and ask them to share their memories with each other. Tell them they will have about 5 minutes for this sharing. When the pair sharing is over, ask for volunteers to tell their stories or memories to the class. Two or three is sufficient, but don't cut this period short – these stories will serve as a kind of shared resource bank for later poems.

Brainstorm some of the themes that came out during the storytelling – childhood, math experiences (especially if rules were included among the objects), food, and so on. Point it out if students have looked at the same object from different perspectives (one person might see a ribbon as something to wrap a package, while another might see it as something for the hair, one person could see a ruler as something for math while another might recall being spanked with one). If they have not, ask questions which encourage it (if knives and chopsticks suggest food, for example, might they also suggest hunger? or, if wire conducts electricity, what does it mean when we say someone is “wired”?). In the course of the discussion, review the meaning of literal and figurative language, and encourage students to move back and forth between them, asking for images suggested by objects.

When the discussion is over, hold up a copy of “Skinny Poem” by Lou Lipsitz. Ask students what they notice about the poem from a distance. They will certainly point out that it is skinny. Remind them that poetry is meant to have short lines, and note that this is certainly an extreme case, with no more than one word per line. Ask them to connect that shape with what they have been discussing, and to speculate on what the poem might be about. Then hand out copies of the poem and read it aloud. Ask students if they have any questions about vocabulary and meaning. When those have been answered, read the poem again. Discuss how the shape of the poem contributes to its meaning. Ask students whether the poem incorporates any of the themes that they have raised. Discuss these. Then ask students to note the structure of the poem and how it uses the themes, how it moves from one to the other.

Now tell students that, as in “Apple Poetry,” they are going to write their own poems, starting with a group poem and progressing to individual ones. Ask students to select an object to start a poem. Brainstorm potential themes and images suggested by the object. As you begin writing the poem, point out that the rule for skinny poems require no more than one word per line. Discuss how that simple rule compares with the open-endedness of writing apple poems, in which they had to decide where to put line breaks. Write a poem as a group, dealing as you go with questions of rhyme, grammar and other issues that arise.

Students will be more familiar with the process by now, and it should go fairly quickly, serving as a review of matters covered in "Apple Poetry."

Finally have students write their own poems individually. Circulate to observe and offer help as requested or as needed. Students will probably need reminding of the one-word-per-line rule. They may also write prosaically, and may need help leaving a word or two out to make more poetic language. Be sure to leave enough time for student sharing of their poems; this is often the most powerful part of the lesson.

Skinny Poem

Lou Lipsitz (1938 -)

Skinny
poem,
all
your
ribs
showing
even
without
a
deep
breath.

thin
legs
rotted
with
disease.

Live
here!
on
this
page,
barely
making it,
like

the
mass
of
mankind

1966

“WHERE I’M FROM” POEMS

Students seldom believe their own lives are the stuff of poetry. This lesson allows them to cast their experience into poetic language, learning about both the density of poetry and its relative freedom from standard grammatical and logical constraints. In this lesson, students examine personal experience poems, based around the recurring refrain “I’m from...”, and write their own. They are encouraged to experiment with figurative language. They consider their audience, its possible ignorance of personal references, and whether to clarify those references. They share their poems, bringing their lives and their personalities vividly into the classroom.

Learning objectives: By the end of the lesson, students will:

- Discuss how poetry can reflect experience
- Identify the audience they are writing for and what that implies about what they write
- Examine the ways in which poetic grammar and logic may differ from those of prose and spoken language
- Review differences between literal and figurative language
- Review the way poetry is laid out on the page and the importance and meaning of line breaks

Instructional strategies: During the lesson, students will use a variety of learning strategies:

- Listening and speaking: students will discuss a number of “I’m From” poems and how they are structured.
- Whole-group discussion: students will discuss as a whole group the first poem and its structures and strategies.
- Small-group discussion: in small groups, students will discuss different “I’m From” poems and share their observations with each other and with the whole group.
- Individual brainstorming: students will brainstorm individually on a structured worksheet to gather personal material and memories for their poems. This activity demonstrates the importance of pre-writing thought and research.
- Writing individual poems: students will write individual “I’m From” poems, producing works of considerable meaning and beauty during this activity.
- Sharing poems: in a safe sharing environment, students get a boost of confidence as their classmates appreciate what they have written. Students learn to appreciate the viewpoints, talents, and experiences of their classmates.

The Lesson

Time: 90 minutes or more

Materials: Several "I'm From" poems, including "Where I'm From" by George Ella Lyon
"I'm From" worksheet

Start by reading aloud "Where I'm From" by George Ella Lyon (attached). Discuss vocabulary and the connections between the items in the poem: what does it tell about the writer, for example, that the first two lines are all about doing laundry, and the next lines are about dirt?

Discuss the concept of audience. Point out that some of the things in the poem appear to be such personal memories that they might not mean anything at all to the reader ("Artemus and Billie's Branch," for example) while others have obvious contexts – remarks from family, friends and teachers, church and Sunday School lessons, and so forth. Point out images, feelings, and figurative language. Encourage students to draw comparisons with their own lives and to speculate on how the writer's might be the same or different.

Be sure to comment on the repetition of "I'm from..." as a way of moving the poem forward, and signaling to the reader what's coming. Point out that this is an example of poetic license – one cannot, of course, literally be "from clothespins" – but note that poetry can have its own logic that would not be acceptable in prose. Point out also the way the line breaks contribute to the meaning and tone of the poem.

When the discussion has run its course, divide the class into small groups and give each a different "I'm From" poem. Have them discuss these poems, looking for the same points: discovering what they can infer about the writer, finding images and other figurative language, pointing out where the author has clarified references for the audience and where left them vague, finding meaning in line breaks and appearance. Each group should then have a spokesperson read its poem and share its observations with the class.

Next, give each student a copy of the "I'm From" worksheet. Note that the categories on the sheet are derived from the original poem; depending on the class, brainstorming for additional categories of memories, circumstances, or experiences may be appropriate. Give students time to fill in the sheets individually so they have material ready to hand when they begin to write their poems. They are not required to fill in all the boxes, nor is there a set number of items required under the headings. What they choose to fill in, and with what, is what will make their poems unique.

Finally, students write their own poems. This can be assigned as homework or done in class. If done in class, students should have at least a half hour to work. At this point, students should be reasonably comfortable writing poems, and willing to share them under the standard class sharing rules.

WHERE I'M FROM

by George Ella Lyon

I am from clothespins,
from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride.
I am from the dirt under the back porch.
(Black, glistening
it tasted like beets.)
I am from the forsythia bush,
the Dutch elm
whose long gone limbs I remember
as if they were my own.

I am from fudge and eyeglasses,
from Imogene and Alafair.
I'm from the know-it-alls
and the pass-it-ons,
from perk up and pipe down.
I'm from He restoreth my soul
with a cottonball lamb
and ten verses I can say myself.

I'm from Artemus and Billie's Branch,
fried corn and strong coffee.
From the finger my grandfather lost
to the auger
the eye my father shut to keep his sight.
Under my bed was a dress box
spilling old pictures,
a sift of lost faces
to drift beneath my dreams.
I am from those moments –
snapped before I budded –
leaf-fall from the family tree.

George Ella Lyon

Name _____

Date _____

"I'M FROM" Worksheet

Under the topic headings below, make lists of things you think of from your life, especially things that have many memories attached to them. Use the back of the sheet if you need more space, and feel free to add new and different headings of things that are important to you (music, pets, or whatever). Then try putting them together in different ways to make a poem you like.

Items around the house
(now or earlier ones)

Items around the yard
or neighborhood

Names of friends and
relatives

Family sayings

School likes and dislikes

Family favorite foods,
celebrations or traditions

Hopes and dreams

Places where you store
memories