

Minnesota Writing Project

--- Demonstration Lesson Template ---

Title of lesson: From Narrative to Poetry

Suggested grade/age: Grades 10-12

Approximate time needed to complete lesson: 45 minutes for work/discussion
45 minutes for poetry slam

Learning objective(s) and significance of lesson:

This lesson teaches students how to move from a piece of prose to a piece of free verse poetry. After writing about a special place, they will hone in on key phrases and vivid adjectives to create their own poem. Then, we'll read Carl Sandburg's poem to see how he brings to life Chicago. Creative writing and writing poetry are often neglected at the high school level, so while studying poetry and literature, I'll often have students experiment as poets themselves. This lesson is intended to be an extension of the specific adjective and verb lessons we do throughout the year while composing essays.

Brief summary/Lesson outline:

Brief Summary: This lesson is incorporated into a literature/poetry unit on 20th century writers. However, I teach this type of activity at various times of the year within the historical context of the literature. The learning involved is appreciating their creativity and ability to write poetry. Our days creating poetry out of prose turns into a celebration of self. With most of our writing focusing on research, students are excited to explore diction and fluency in a new form.

Lesson Outline:

- Harry Wong speaks of using bell work as a way of focusing students right away: Students will write about a special place. After writing for 3-4 minutes, I'll give them some ideas to think about (maybe even closing their eyes): 1. If their place had a gender, what would it be? 2. If their place wore clothes, what would they wear? 3. What kinds of jobs does this place have? 4. What goes on here? 5. Does anyone say negative things about this place? If so, what? How do you refute those comments? 6. What adjectives show your place?
- After they've had a 5-10 minutes of writing, we'll move into Carl Sandburg's poem *Chicago* to show his place in a piece of poetry. **Today, a volunteer will read this poem aloud.** When finished, students will choose phrases that were especially poignant and we'll review the importance of diction.
- When finished discussing "Chicago", students will move with a partner to share their own place – they don't need to read their whole paragraph; they should just talk about why they chose it then read some of their favorite lines.
- While partners are listening, they should jot down some key phrases/words/adjectives that resonate with them so that the writer may incorporate the verbal text into their poem. Partners may also ask for elaboration of points.

A discussion might look like this: **Writer:** I wrote about Grand Forks and how it stinks in the spring. **Listener:** What does it smell like and what is it from? **Writer:** it has the stench of burnt French fries from the sugar beet plant and manure from fertilizing fields.

- Using their own paragraphs and feedback from peers, students will underline key phrases and words.
- With the underlined parts, students will start composing their poems.
- If they want to set it up exactly like Sandburg, that's fine or they can create a "place" free verse poem.
- If time allows, students may share then, OR we wait until the next day and have a poetry reading where students recite their own pieces.

Related Resources:

Harry Wong: *The First Days of School*

Possible extensions or adaptations for different purposes/student needs:

- I use this same idea with Walt Whitman's poem *I Hear America Singing*. After talking about the 19th century and Whitman's reasons for writing about America as it was, we discuss where America is today. Students choose a theme and create their own *I Hear America* ??????? poems. Again, we discuss the importance of diction (showing not telling).
- Students could use any poem. For example, if we were to use Emily Dickinson's poem, *Hope is a Thing with Feathers*, students could focus on an idea and create a prepositional phrase to complete. i.e. –Love is a Thing of Contradiction.

http://thewgbhlab.org/nova_video/everyday-moments - video scenes of Brooklyn.

There are several poems that could be used for this activity! Have fun! ☺

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