

The Grammar of Poetry

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1. In my humble opinion, teachers are most successful in teaching poetry they like. So choose poems you like. The kids will like them better because you do!
2. Toss out the textbooks! In most cases, the poems are chosen more for political correctness than for usable poetry. If you like a poem, fine – use it. But don't just teach it because it's in your book.
3. Kids have, unfortunately, a resistance to poetry, based on too many bad poems taught in the lower grades. Honestly, do you want to read about June and the moon? Choose poems that have something to say to them. Don't be lazy, and don't let the kids be lazy. You should always be on the lookout for exciting poetry that says something to them. Have them bring song lyrics to school once a six weeks, and give extra credit if they can recite lyrics. (Of course, you have to vet these first!) Memorization is your friend. If kids can memorize a rap song, why can't they memorize a short poem of their choice?
4. The sticky question of terms for kids to know is one that can best be answered by your vertical team. If you don't teach in a district with a vertical team, talk to your senior English teachers. What terms do kids ABSOLUTELY HAVE TO KNOW by the time they are seniors? Then work backwards from that point to your own grade level. At the very least, kids need to know the basics (simile, metaphor, personification, onomatopoeia, alliteration, hyperbole, end-stopped lines, enjambed lines, oxymoron, allusion, symbol, understatement, theme, motif) by the time they get to grade 10.
5. The other sticky question regards meter. Yes, by the time they are seniors, kids do need to be able to distinguish meter. I used to teach it regularly to my honors 7th graders, and they got it. It's mostly a question of time. If you have it to spend, and you enjoy it, go for it. If you don't enjoy it, at least mention it. PLEASE!
6. Why study poetry at all? Well, aside from the fact that it's always on the senior AP test, poetry supplies in microcosm a chance for kids to explore the most important thing they have to learn in pre-AP classes: MEANING. How does the poet use language to CREATE MEANING? If kids can articulate meaning and tie it to text in short poems, they can do it in larger works of literature. Use of TPCASTT and other mnemonic devices to explore meaning can be very helpful tools to help kids dig out the meaning in poetry. Ultimately, though, it is the ability of the student to refer to items of text and explain that text in terms of the effect on the reader that is the most important. Poetry gives kids a chance to do this very thing.

7. Dialectical journals (level 2 journals) are quite helpful, and may be used as early as 7th grade. Kids have to be walked through them at first, but they soon learn the drill. The kid who can do a level 2 journal as an 8th grader is well-qualified to comment on literature using concrete proof from text by the time he reaches junior and senior English.

8. READ ALOUD. Insist that kids follow the sense of the lines, reading from period to period. Do it in a round robin or whatever. POETRY IS MEANT TO BE HEARD. See Longfellow's "The Day is Done."

NOTES ON THE POEMS:

1. "The Sounds of Silence" – Simon and Garfunkel. I used this one for my example poetry project. It's a good example of poetry set to music, and it includes some killer metaphors, as well as examples of oxymoron. We also tend to have a really lovely class argument about the meaning of the poem. Is Simon talking about the evil effects of advertising on our society? CAN I SUPPORT MY CONCLUSION FROM THE TEXT? Ah, there we get to the big question of meaning – and that's why kids need to study poetry. Don't forget to talk in depth about his TONE. Would a reader "get" this poem if he thought it was cheerful?
2. "Janet Waking" – John Crowe Ransom. USE THIS ONE. It's in the AP guide, and it works an absolute treat. I used it successfully with 8th graders, sophomores, and juniors. It's just a perfect example of so many things the kids need. For another poem on the subject, find Ransom's "Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter." The kids think the poem is funny, yet they perceive the tragedy involved. I like to go through this one pointing out strange and unusual words; usually I have to explain the chicken's comb. What is ironic about the fact that the comb stands up and the chicken doesn't? The kids also like "transmogrifying" – the dictionary tells us that this is a "humorous" word regarding a transformation. Now we get to pounce on diction. Why did Ransom use this word? What clue in the second stanza tells the identity of the speaker? Point out that the speaker is not necessarily the poet.
3. "Forgiveness" – George Roemisch. This one is great to teach allusion and metaphor. I also used this one with 8th graders. Start with the words *Verdun* and *Da Nang*; usually at least one kid will connect Da Nang with Vietnam. From there it's not too long a step to World War I and *wall of shame*: Berlin Wall. Why are all three places evocative of a need for forgiveness? Kids can also use this poem as a classic way to remember metaphor.
4. "The Bride" – John Suckling / "The Destruction of Sennacherib" – George Gordon, Lord Byron / "Very Like a Whale" – Ogden Nash. Teach these as a trio. Start with "The Bride" and point out the ideals of womanhood in the 1600s (little feet, tiny finger, light dancing, white face with apple cheeks, thin upper lip and full lower lip, doesn't talk much!) You'll have to do some explaining. Then move to "Destruction" – give the kids a sense of the Bible story first. The Kingdom of Israel was being invaded by the Assyrians. The Israeli king refused to surrender, and said that the Lord would protect them from the attackers. The attackers laughed. The next day the attackers were dead. Point out the simile in the first line. Kids don't know that a sheep fold is a sheep pen; how would a wolf attack a pen of sheep? *Cohorts* is an anachronistic reference to the Roman army's basic unit, rather like a battalion. Note the other Old Testament allusions. Then read aloud "Very Like a Whale" and try not to laugh. Your top kids will get it

immediately – and they will probably agree. Go over the allusions (some are noted at the bottom of the page). Point out the use of feminine rhyme: words of more than one syllable at the end of the line. (“better for” – “metaphor”) What is the tone of this poem as compared to the

tone of the previous two? How does Nash use humorous allusions to point out the absurd elements in his own art?

5. “Crystal Moment” – R.P.T. Coffin. Frankly, I don’t like this poet much; I find his use of couplets annoying. But it’s a good chance to point out couplets in a form that is accessible to any 7th grader. Younger kids do “get” this poem. Another accessible poem by this poet is “Secret Heart.”

6. “Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening” – Robert Frost. Old chestnuts are old chestnuts for a reason, and it’s hard to beat the craftiness of our own New England poet. Point out the cunning rhyme scheme in this deceptively simple poem. Many reviewers feel that the woods in this poem represent, in an archetypal sense, death. Like all of Frost’s work, this poem is an “onion” – there are layers of meaning.

7. “In Flanders Fields” – John McCrae / “*Dulce et Decorum Est*” – Wilfred Owen. I use these as a pair. How is the tone of each poet different? McCrae’s patriotic World War I song exhorts the reader to “take up our quarrel with the foe.” Remind kids that poppies symbolize the sleep of death: see *The Wizard of Oz*. (Do your best Wicked Witch of the West imitation here!) Owen points out the futility of the lie told to young soldiers. I have used both of these with 8th graders, and the kids are fascinated by the nastiness and horror of the images. Go through this one to point out the oxymoron (“ecstasy of fumbling”), metaphors (“blood-shod”), and similes. Then talk about gas masks and the “misty panes” as well as the nasty details of poison gas warfare. Kids can write good short paragraphs tying language to meaning. Depending on the amount of detail you want to use, you might also use bits of Sassoon’s “December Stillness” here, as well as Owen’s “Mental Cases” and Muir’s “Return of the Greeks.” These three are a little to hard for 8th graders, but 9th and 10 graders can cope.

8. “In Just-spring” – e.e. cummings. Kids are puzzled by this one initially. The “little lame balloonman” turns out to be Pan, god of wild things and panic fear, among other things (“the goat-footed balloonMan”). Don’t you love “mud luscious”? Names of boys and of girls are run together to imply all children. The poem seems to stop in mid-stride: why?

9. “Nothing Gold Can Stay” – Frost / “Birthright” – John Drinkwater. Another useful pair. If you teach Hinton’s *Outsiders*, you know the first poem. *Sic transit gloria mundi* and all that good stuff – nothing good lasts. We can’t be kids forever, not even Ponyboy. We can’t “stay gold” – but we have to try. Drinkwater addresses the same concept in his poem, using allusions to famous losses. You’ll probably have to explain Rameses’ lost romance and Ariadne, the (briefly) beloved of Theseus. She helped him get out of the labyrinth by supplying a “clew” of thread and a sword. He thanked her by abandoning her on the island of Naxos, because she took part in the rites of Dionysus. (Don’t go there . . .) Anyway, it’s a poignant piece. Kids as young as 7th graders can understand these two, with a little help, and can write about loss.

10. "Tomorrow" – Shakespeare / "Out, out – " – Frost again. Do the Shakespeare first – you might even require memorization. Point out the apostrophe ("Out, out, brief candle!") and the series of metaphors. I always tell the kids about the Faulkner novel, *The Sound and the Fury*, which is indeed "a tale told by an idiot. This poem is obviously tied to the previous two in theme. Then go on to the Frost poem, which continues that theme. You can underline the importance of allusion here. Why won't kids understand the Frost poem if they don't see the allusion to Shakespeare? The Frost poem's use of anaphora ("snarled and rattled") – also an animism – sets up the bestial nature of the event, echoed in the callous attitude that closes the poem. The kids find this one rather horrifying. You will, however, have to explain "ether."
11. "The New Colossus" – Emma Lazarus. This one has fallen victim to political correctness, particularly the third from the last line. However, it's one that kids as young as 7th grade can grasp. Show pictures of the Colossus of Rhodes, readily available in any encyclopedia. Many kids will quickly grasp that the NEW Colossus is the Statue of Liberty. It's time for a mini-history lesson – kids probably discussed the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World in 6th grade, and may know a little about the Statue of Liberty. Now, point out the reverse simile in the first line and go from there. This little gem is full of poetic devices. Why is she standing at the "sunset gates"? When you get to the end, tell them that the third to the last line is no longer inscribed on the pedestal of the statue, since nobody these days wants to be described as "wretched refuse of your teeming shore." Kind of makes you think of cockroaches, doesn't it? Then point out Lazarus's true point. Is she being rude about immigrants? No. America is the land of opportunity to those who are forced by circumstance to live like cockroaches. (Just don't mention *The Jungle* . . .)
12. "A Poison Tree" – William Blake. Yes, we all need anger management. Apply this to kids' lives.
13. "A Modern Major-General" – William Gilbert. This poem is actually a musical selection from Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Pirates of Penzance*. See if you can find a recording. It occurred to me that the G & S "patter songs" were rather similar to rap – only cleaner. Point out that the last verse tells the reader that our "modern major-general" is actually an incompetent idiot who knows absolutely nothing useful about war. Quite tongue-in-cheek in tone, this is a bit of froth.
14. "Two Tramps in Mud Time" – Frost. This one is difficult. Use only with older kids. Frost is commenting here that our work ("vocation") and our play ("avocation") must both be meaningful, "for Heaven and the future's sake." Madeleine L'Engle uses this poem as a major motif in *The Arm of the Starfish*.
15. "Red Wheelbarrow" – W. C. Williams / several other snippets that create images, from various sources. I liked all of these simply because kids can get that brief flash of imagery
16. "Penelope, to an Absent Ulysses" – Margaret Denores. Use this with Tennyson's "Ulysses" and Cavafy's "Ithaka." Point out the differences in tone. How do all the speakers regard the war? Also appropriate for older kids is Muir's "The Return of the Greeks."

17. "To Anacreon in Heaven" – English drinking song. Yes, this is the original set of words to "Star-Spangled Banner"!! Have fun with this if you teach older kids. What a contrast!

18. "Daniel Webster's Horses" – Elizabeth Coatsworth. Use this with Poe's "The Raven" and "Annabel Lee" if teaching younger kids. It's an accessible scary poem.

19. "Music I Heard with You" – Conrad Aiken / "Recuerdo" – Edna St. Vincent Millay. Use these love poems with 9th graders; contrast with songs currently on the radio. Why do these two poems have contrasting tone? Use with the excerpt from "Dover Beach" and "My Life Closed Twice" on the next page for more takes on love.

20. "Macavity: The Mystery Cat" – T.S. Eliot. Get the recording and play it for the kids. There's no great depth here. It's just fun. Poetry can be "just fun."

21. "Ozymandias" – Percy Bysshe Shelley. Show the kids a picture of the Sphinx. What is the poet saying about the vanity and arrogance of human endeavor?

22. Lyric snippets

Universal Truths in Poetry and Life

Universality / Universal truth:

Something that has been experienced by people in every time and every culture.

* emotions

love

hate

joy

sorrow

anger

resentment

wonder

* pain

mental emotional

physical spiritual

* FAITH

* friendship

* physical needs

* work

* death and birth

* war and peace

* enjoyment of nature

* developmental stages

infancy - youth

adulthood – middle age

old age

TONE WORDS

POSITIVE Tone / Attitude Words

Lighthearted	hopeful	exuberant	enthusiastic
Confident	cheery	optimistic	loving
Amused	elated	sympathetic	compassionate
Complimentary	passionate	proud	

NEGATIVE Tone / Attitude Words

ANGER:

Angry	disgusted	outraged
Furious	wrathful	bitter
Irritated	indignant	threatening

HUMOR / IRONY / SARCASM:

Scornful	disdainful	contemptuous	mock-serious
Sarcastic	cynical	condescending	bantering
whimsical			
Critical	facetious	patronizing	irreverent
amused			
Satiric	sardonic	mock-heroic	taunting
Insolent	pompous	ironic	flippant

SORROW / FEAR / WORRY:

Somber	elegiac	melancholic	sad
Disturbed	mournful	solemn	serious
Apprehensive	concerned	fearful	despairing
Gloomy	sober	foreboding	hopeless
Staid	resigned		

NEUTRAL Tone / Attitude Words

Formal	objective	incredulous	nostalgic
Ceremonial	candid	shocked	reminiscent
Restrained	clinical	baffled	sentimental
Detached	questioning	disbelieving	informative
Instructive	learned	urgent	factual
Didactic	authoritative	matter-of-fact	admonitory

TPCASTT: Poetry Analysis
(Adapted from Connie Vermeer)

- TITLE** Look at the title before you read the poem.
** Write the literal meaning of the title: what do you think it means?
- (READ ALOUD)** Read the poem aloud. Don't stop at the end of the lines, unless you see punctuation. Read with feeling!
- PARAPHRASE** Put the poem in your own words. Look up any words you don't know.
** Write a paragraph in your own words to paraphrase the poem, or write a sentence or two to explain each verse, stanza, or section.
- CONNOTATION** Look for poetic devices like those listed below. Remember, no poem has all items.
1. imagery 2. details 3. metaphor 4. simile 5. symbolism
6. personification 7. onomatopoeia 8. rhyme 9. alliteration
10. diction 11. allusions 12. irony 13. syntax 14. language
** Choose at least five things you find in this poem and write a sentence to explain each one.
- ATTITUDE / TONE** Examine the speaker's and the poet's attitude towards self, other characters, the subject. Look for attitudes of characters other than the speaker. Look for poet's attitude towards the speaker, other characters, the subject, the reader.
** Write several sentences to identify and explain the tone / attitude.
- SHIFT** Note and label any shifts in structure, content, or tone. Remember: words that often signal shift include YET, BUT, THEN, STILL, HOWEVER. Look for the time and place of the poem, punctuation clues, structure, thought divisions, or irony to signal shift.
** Write one or more sentences to discuss the shift.
- TITLE** Look at the title again. Has your understanding of the title changed?
** Write a sentence or two about the title. Be sure your sentences reflect the changes in your understanding of the poem. How has your understanding changed since step one?
- THEME** Identify the theme (truth about life expressed in literature) by identifying the main ideas discussed in the poem. Put those ideas together WITHOUT NAMES to reflect a truth about life or something learned about life.
** Write down several ideas from the poem. Then write a complete sentence that states a theme from the poem. Many poems have several themes.

(Use the statements marked with ** to create a writing assignment.)

“The Sounds of Silence” – Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel

Hello, darkness, my old friend,
I've come to talk with you again
Because a vision softly creeping
Left its seeds while I was sleeping,
And the vision that was planted in my brain
Still remains,
Within the sounds of silence.

In restless dreams I walked alone
On narrow streets of cobblestone.
Beneath the halo of a street lamp
I turned my collar to the cold and damp
When my eyes were stabbed by the flash of a neon light,
Split the night,
And touched the sounds of silence.

And in the naked light I saw
Ten thousand people, maybe more:
People talking without speaking,
People hearing without listening,
People writing songs that voices never shared.
No one dared
Disturb the sound of silence.

“Fools!” said I. “You do not know
Silence like a cancer grows.
Hear my words that I might teach you!
Take my arms that I might reach you!”
But my words like silent raindrops fell
And echoed in the sounds of silence.

And the people bowed and prayed
To the neon god they'd made.
And the sign flashed out its warning
In the words that it was forming.
And the sign said, “The words of the prophets
Are written on the subway walls
And tenement halls,
And whispered in the sounds of silence.”

“Janet Waking” – John Crowe Ransom

Beautifully Janet slept
Till it was deeply morning. She woke then
And thought about her dainty-feathered hen,
To see how it had kept.

One kiss she gave her mother,
Only a small one gave she to her daddy
Who would have kissed each curl of his shining baby;
No kiss at all for her brother.

“Old Chucky, old Chucky!” she cried,
Running across the world upon the grass
To Chucky’s house and listening. But alas,
Her Chucky had died.
It was a transmogrifying bee
Came droning down on Chucky’s old bald head
And sat and put the poison. It scarcely bled,
But how exceedingly

And purplely did the know
Swell with the venom and communicate
Its rigor. Now the poor comb stood up straight
But Chucky did not.

So there was Janet
Kneeling on the wet grass, crying her brown hen
(Translated far beyond the daughters of men)
To rise and walk upon it.

And weeping fast as she had breath
Janet implored us, “Wake her from her sleep!”
And would not be instructed in how deep
Was the forgetful kingdom of death.

"Forgiveness"

-- George Roemisch

Forgiveness is the wind-blown bud
which
blooms in placid beauty at Verdun

Forgiveness is the tiny slate-grey
sparrow
which has built its nest of twigs
and
string among the shards of glass
upon the
wall of shame.

Forgiveness is the child who
laughs in merry
ecstasy beneath the toothed fence
that closes in Da Nang.

Forgiveness is the fragrance of the violet
which still clings fast to the
heel that crushed it.

Forgiveness is the broken dream
which
hides itself within the corner of the
mind oft called forgetfulness so
that it
will not bring pain to the dreamer.

Forgiveness is the reed which stands
up
straight and green when nature's
might
rampage halts, full spent.

Forgiveness is a God who will not
leave
us after all we've done.

“The Bride” – Sir John Suckling (from “A Ballad upon a Wedding”)

Her little feet beneath her petticoat,
Like mice stole in and out,
 As if they fear'd the light:
But O she dances such a way!
 No sun upon an Easter-day
 Is half so fine a sight.

Her finger was so small, the ring
Would not stay on, which they did bring,
 It was too wide a peck;
And to say truth (for out it must)
It looked like the great collar, just,
 About our young colt's neck.

Her cheeks so rare a white was on,
No daisy makes comparison;
 Who sees them is undone;
For streaks of red were mingled there,
Such as are on a Catherine pear;
 The side that's next the sun.

Her lips were red, and one was thin,
Compar'd to that was next her chin
 (Some bee had stung it newly);
But, Dick, her eyes so guard her face;
I durst no more upon them gaze
 Then on the sun in July.

Her mouth so small, when she does speak,
Thou'dst swear her teeth her words did break
 That they might passage get;
But she so handled still the matter
They came as good as ours, or better,
 And are not spent a whit . . .

“The Destruction of Sennacherib” – George Gordon, Lord Byron
(see 2nd Kings 18 and 19, particularly verse 35)

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

Lie the leaves of the forest when summer is green,
The host with their banners at sunset were seen;
Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.

For the angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and forever grew still!

And there lay the steed with his nostril still wide,
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride:
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

And there lay the rider distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow and the rust on his mail'
And the tents were all silent, the banners, alone,
The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.

And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temples of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!

“Very Like a Whale” – Ogden Nash

One thing that literature would be greatly the better for
Would be a more restricted employment by authors of simile and metaphor.
Authors of all races, be they Greeks, Teutons or Celts,
Can't seem just to say that anything is the thing it is but have to go out of their way to say
that it is like something else.
What does it mean when we are told
That the Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold?
In the first place, George Gordon Byron had had enough experience
To know that it probably wasn't just on Assyrian, it was a lot of Assyrians.
However, as too many arguments are apt to induce apoplexy and thus hinder longevity,
We'll let it pass as one Assyrian for the sake of brevity.
Now then, this particular Assyrian, the one whose cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold,
Just what does the poet mean when he says he came down like a wolf on the fold?
In heaven and earth more than is dreamed of in our philosophy there are a great many things,
But I don't imagine that among them there is a wolf with purple and gold cohorts or purple
and gold anythings.
No, no, Lord Byron, before I'll believe that this Assyrian was actually like a wolf I must have
some kind of proof;
Did he run on all fours and did he have a hairy tail and a big red mouth and big white teeth and
did he say Woof woof woof?
Frankly I think it very unlikely, and all you were entitled to say, at the very most,
Was that the Assyrian cohorts came down like a lot of Assyrian cohorts about to destroy
the Hebrew host.
But that wasn't fancy enough for Lord Byron, oh dear me no, he had to invent a lot of figures of
speech and then interpolate them,
With the result that whenever you mention Old Testament soldiers to people they say Oh yes,
they're the ones that a lot of wolves dressed up in gold and purple ate them.
That's the kind of thing that's being done all the time by poets, from Homer to Tennyson;
They're always comparing ladies to lilies and veal to venison.
How about the man who wrote,
Her little feet stole in and out like mice beneath her petticoat?
Wouldn't anybody but a poet think twice
Before stating that his girl's feet were mice?
Then they always say things like that after a winter storm
The snow is a white blanket. Oh it is, is it, all right then, you sleep under a six-inch blanket
of snow and I'll sleep under a half-inch blanket of unpoetical blanket material and
we'll see which one keeps warm,
And after that maybe you'll begin to comprehend dimly
What I mean by too much metaphor and simile.

“Crystal Moment” – Robert P. Tristram Coffin

Once or twice this side of death
Things can make one hold his breath.

From my boyhood I remember
A crystal moment of September.

A wooded island rang with sounds
Of church bells in the throats of hounds.

A buck leaped out and took the tide
With jewels flowering past each side.

With his high head like a tree
He swam within a yard of me.

I saw the golden drop of light
In his eyes turned dark with fright.

I saw the forest's holiness
On him like a fierce caress.

Fear made him lovely past belief,
My heart was trembling like a leaf.

He leaned towards the land and life
With need upon him like a knife.

In his wake the hot hounds churned,
They stretched their muzzles out and yearned.

They bayed no more, but swam and throbbed,
Hunger drove them till they sobbed.

Pursued, pursuers reached the shore
And vanished. I saw nothing more.

So they passed, a pageant such
As only gods could witness much,

Life and death upon one tether
And running beautifully together.

“Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” – Robert Frost

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village, though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a village near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy winds and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark, and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

“In Flanders Fields” – John McCrae

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

“Dulce et Decorum Est”

- Wilfred Owen

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs,
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame, all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of gas shells dropping softly behind.

Gas! Gas! Quick, boys! – An ecstasy of fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime.
Dim through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams before my helpless sight
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes wilting in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin,
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs
Bitten as the cud
Of vile incurable sores on innocent tongues –
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest,
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old lie: *Dulce et decorum est*
Pro patria mori. *

**It is sweet and dignified to die for one's country.*

“Music I Heard with You” – Conrad Aiken

Music I heard with you was more than music
And bread I broke with you was more than bread;
Now that I am without you, all is desolate;
All that was once so beautiful is dead.

Your hands once touched this table and this silver,
And I have seen your fingers hold this glass.
These things do not remember you, beloved, --
And yet your touch upon them will not pass.

For it was in my heart you moved among them,
And blessed them with your hands and with your eyes'
And in my heart they will remember always, --
They knew you once, O beautiful and wise.

“Requero” – Edna St. Vincent Millay

We were very tired, we were very merry –
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry,
It was bare and bright, and smelled like a stable –
But we looked into a fire, we leaned across a table,
We lay on a hill-top underneath the moon;
And the whistles kept blowing, and the dawn came soon.

We were very tired, we were very merry –
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry;
And you ate an apple and I ate a pear,
From a dozen of each we had bought somewhere;
And the sky went wan, and the wind came cold,
And the sun rose dripping, a bucketful of gold.

We were very tired, we were very merry,
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.
We hailed, “Good-morrow, mother!” to a shawl-covered head,
And bought a morning paper, which neither of us read;
And she wept, “God bless you!” for the apples and the pears,
And we gave her all our money but our subway fares.

“Daniel Webster’s Horses” – Elizabeth Coatsworth

If when the wind blows
Rattling like trees,
Clicking like skeletons’
Elbows and knees,

You hear along the road
Three horses pass –
Do not go near the dark
Cold window-glass.

If when the first snow lies
Whiter than bones
You see the mark of hoofs
Cut to the stones,

Hoofs of three horses
Going abreast –
Turn about, turn about,
A closed door is best!

Upright in the earth
Under the sod
They buried three horses
Bridled and shod,

Daniel Webster’s horses –
He said as he grew old,
“Flesh, I loved riding,
Shall I not love it, cold?”

“Shall I not love to ride
Bone astride bone,
When the cold wind blows
And snow covers stone?”

“Bury them on their feet
With bridle and bit.
They were fine horses –
See their shoes fit.”

“Penelope, to an Absent Ulysses” – Margaret Denores

Should you come back to me, in this my room,
And push aside the frosty, green brocade,
Hearing the sleepy snarling of the loom
Whereon a silver-threaded hunt is laid,
Perhaps, because the pattern tired my eyes,
I should look up and see you, standing so,
Smiling assuredly, Ulysses – wise,
Your brownness strange against the portico.
Oh, I should drop my shuttle, rise, and take
Your battered, golden head between my hand,
And I’d not tell you how you cannot wake
A love in me for your dim “other lands.”
So I should hold you; yet how far apart
Your life-crowned head and my cool-shaded heart.

“To Anacreon in Heaven” – English drinking song

To Anacreon in heav’n, where he sat in full glee,
A few sons of harmony sent a petition,
That he their inspirer and patron would be!
When this answer arrived from the jolly old Grecian:
“Voice, fiddle, and flute
No longer be mute!
I’ll lend you my name and inspire you to boot!
And, besides, I’ll instruct you like me to entwine
The Myrtle of Venus with Bacchus’s vine!”

if everything happens that can't be done
- e.e. cummings

if everything happens that can't be done
(and anything's righter
than books
could plan)
the stupidest teacher will almost guess
(with a run
skip
around we go yes)
there's nothing as something as one

one hasn't a why or because or although
(and buds know better
than books
don't grow)
one's anything old being everything new
(with a what
which
around we come who)
one's everyanything so

so world is a leaf so tree is a bough
(and birds sing sweeter
than books tell how)
so here is away and so your is a my
(with a down
up
around again fly)
forever was never till now

now I love you and you love me
(and books are shutter
than books can be)
and deep in the high that does nothing but fall
(with a shout
each
around we go all)
there's somebody calling who's we

we're anything brighter than even the sun
(we're everything greater
than books
might mean)
we're everyanything more than believe
(with a spin

leap
alive we're alive)
we're wonderful one times one

Love Poem – John Frederick Nims

My clumsiest dear, whose hands shipwreck vases,
At whose quick touch all glasses chip and ring,
Whose palms are bulls in china, burs in linen,
And have no cunning with any soft thing

Except all ill-at-ease fidgeting people:
The refugee uncertain at the door
You make at home; deftly you steady
The drunk clambering on his undulant floor.

Unpredictable dear, the taxi-drivers' terror,
Shrinking from far headlights pale as a dime
Yet leaping before red apoplectic streetcars –
Misfit in any space. And never on time.

A wrench in clocks and the solar system. Only
With words and people and love you move at ease.
In traffic of wit expertly manoeuvre
And keep us, all devotion, at your knees.

Forgetting your coffee spreading on our flannel,
Your lipstick grinning on our coat,
So gaily in love's unbreakable heaven
Our souls on glory of spilt bourbon float.

Be with me darling, early and late. Smash glasses –
I will study wry music for your sake.
For should your hands drop white and empty
All the toys of the world would break.

“Nothing Gold Can Stay” – Robert Frost

Nature’s first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold;
Her early leaf’s a flower,
But only so an hour.

The leaf subsides to leaf;
So Eden sank to grief.
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay

“A Sight in Camp in the Daybreak Gray and Dim” – Walt Whitman

A sight in camp in the daybreak gray and dim,
As from my tent I emerge so early sleepless,
As slow I walk in the cool fresh air the path near by the hospital tent,
Three forms I see on stretchers lying, brought out there untended lying,
Over each the blanket spread, ample brownish woolen blanket,
Gray and heavy blanket, folding, covering all.

Curious I halt and silent stand,
Then with light fingers I from the face of the nearest the first just lift the blanket;
Who are you elderly man so gaunt and grim, with well-gray’d hair, and flesh all sunken
about the eyes?
Who are you my dear comrade?

Then to the second I step – and who are you my child and darling?
Who are you sweet boy with cheeks yet blooming?

Then to the third – a face nor child nor old, very calm, as of beautiful yellow-white ivory;
Young man I think I know you – I think this face is the face of the Christ himself,
Dead and divine and brother of all, and here again he lies.

“Birthright” – John Drinkwater

Lord Rameses of Egypt sighed
Because a summer evening passed;
And little Ariadne cried
That summer’s fancy fell at last
To dust; and young Verona died
When beauty’s hour was overcast.

Theirs was the bitterness we know
Because the clouds of hawthorn keep
So short a state; and kisses go
To tombs unfathomably deep;
While Rameses and Romeo
And little Ariadne sleep.

“The Garden” – Ezra Pound

Like a skein of loose silk blown against a wall
She walks by the railing of a path in Kensington Gardens,*
And she is dying piece-meal of a sort of emotional anaemia.

And round about there is a rabble
Of the filthy, sturdy, unkillable infants of the very poor.
They shall inherit the earth.

In her is the end of breeding.
Her boredom is exquisite and excessive.
She would like someone to speak to her,
And is almost afraid that I will commit that indiscretion.

* a beautiful and manicured series of gardens at a place near London, England

“Desert Places” – Robert Frost

Snow falling and night falling fast, oh, fast,
In a field I looked into going past,
And the ground almost covered smooth in snow,
But a few weeds and stubble showing last.

The woods around it have it – it is theirs.
All animals are smothered in their lairs.
I am too absent-spirited to count;
The loneliness includes me unawares.

And lonely as it is, that loneliness
Will be more lonely ere it will be less –
A blanker whiteness of benighted snow
With no expression, nothing to express.

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces
Between stars – on stars where no human race is.
I have it in me so much nearer home
To scare myself with my own desert places.

“nobody loses all the time” – e.e. cummings

nobody loses all the time

I had an uncle named
Sol who was a born failure and
nearly everybody said he should have gone
into vaudeville perhaps because my Uncle Sol could
sing McCann He Was A Diver on Xmas Eve like Hell Itself which
may or may not account for the fact that my Uncle

Sol indulged in that possibly most inexcusable
of all to use a highfalootin phrase
luxuries that is or to
wit farming and be
it needlessly
added

my Uncle Sol's farm
failed because the chickens
ate the vegetables so
my Uncle Sol had a
chicken farm till the
skunks ate the chickens then

my Uncle Sol
had a skunk farm but
the skunks caught cold and
died and so
my Uncle sol imitated the
skunks in a subtle manner

or by drowning himself in the watertank
but somebody who'd given my Uncle Sol a Victor
Victrola and records while he lived presented to
him upon the auspicious occasion of his decease a
scrumptious not to mention splendiferous funeral with
tall boys in black gloves and flowers and everything and

I remember we all cried like the Missouri
when my Uncle Sol's coffin lurched because
somebody pressed a button
(and down went
my Uncle
Sol

and started a worm farm)

“Out, Out –

-- Robert Frost

The buzz saw snarled and rattled in the yard
And made dust and dropped stove-length sticks of wood,
Sweet-scented stuff when the breeze drew across it.
And from there those that lifted eyes could count
Five mountain ranges one behind the other
Under the sunset far into Vermont.
And the saw snarled and rattle, snarled and rattled,
As it ran light, or had to bear a load.
And nothing happened: day was all but done.
Call it a day, I wish they might have said
To please the boy by giving him the half hour
That a boy counts so much when saved from work.
His sister stood beside them in her apron
To tell them “Supper.” At the word, the saw,
As if to prove saws knew what supper meant,
Leaped out at the boy’s hand, or seemed to leap –
He must have given the hand. However it was,
Neither refused the meeting. But the hand!
The boy’s first outcry was rueful laugh,
As he swung toward them holding up the hand
Half in appeal, but half as if to keep
The life from spilling. Then the boy saw all –
Since he was old enough to know, big boy
Doing a man’s work, though a child at heart –
He saw all spoiled. “Don’t let him cut my hand off –
The doctor, when he comes. Don’t let him, sister!”
So. But the hand was gone already.
The doctor put him in the dark of ether.
He lay and puffed his lips out with his breath.
And then – the watcher at his pulse took fright.
No one believed. They listened at his heart.
Little – less – nothing! – and that ended it.
No more to build on there. And they, since they
Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs.

from "Song of Myself" - - Walt Whitman

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I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contained,
I stand and look at them long and long.
They do not sweat and whine about their condition,
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,
They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God,
Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania of owning things,
Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands of years ago,
Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth.
So they show their relations to me and I accept them,
They bring me tokens of myself, they evince them plainly in their possession.

I wonder where they get those tokens,
Did I pass that way huge times ago and negligently drop them?
Myself moving forward then and now and forever,
Gathering and showing more always and with velocity,
Infinite and omnigenous, and the like of these among them,
Not too exclusive toward the reachers of my remembrancers,
Picking out here one that I love, and now go with him on brotherly terms.
A gigantic beauty of a stallion, fresh and responsive to my caresses,
Head high in the forehead, wide between the ears,
Limbs glossy and supple, tail dusting the ground,
Eyes full of sparkling wickedness, ears finely cut, flexibly moving.
His nostrils dilate as my heels embrace him,
His well-built limbs tremble with pleasure as we race around and return.
I but use you a minute, then I resign you, stallion,
Why do I need your paces when I myself outgallop them?
Even as I stand or sit passing faster than you.

"Tomorrow" – Shakespeare, from *MacBeth*

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

Tree at my Window – Robert Frost

Tree at my window, window tree,
My sash is lowered when night comes on;
But let there never be curtain drawn
Between you and me.

Vague dream-head lifted out of the ground,
And thing next most diffuse to cloud,
Not all your light tongues talking aloud
Could be profound.

But, tree, I have seen you taken and tossed,
And if you have seen me when I slept,
You have seen me when I was taken and swept
And all but lost.

That day she put our heads together,
Fate had her imagination about her,
Your head so much concerned with outer,
Mind with inner, weather.

The New Colossus – Emma Lazarus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door."

“A Poison Tree” – William Blake

I was angry with my friend,
I told my wrath, my wrath did end:
I was angry with my foe,
I told it no, my wrath did grow

And I water'd it with fears,
Night and morning with my tears;
And I sunned it with smiles
And with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night,
Till it bore an apple bright;
And my foe beheld it shine,
And he knew that it was mind,

And into my garden stole,
When the night had veiled the pole:
In the morning glad I see
My foe outstretch'd beneath the tree.

“The Modern Major-General” – William S. Gilbert

I am the very model of a modern Major-General;
I've information vegetable, animal, and mineral:
I know the kings of England, and I quote the fights historical,
From marathon to Waterloo, in order categorical.
I'm very well acquainted, too, with matters mathematical;
I understand equations both the simple and quadratical,
About binomial theorem I'm teeming with a lot o' news,
With many cheerful facts about the square of the hypotenuse;
I'm very good at integral and differential calculus;
I know the scientific names of beings animalculous.
In short in matters vegetable, animal, and mineral,
I am the very model of a modern Major-General.

I know our mythic history, King Arthur's and Sir Caradoc's,
I answer hard acrostics, I've a pretty taste for Paradox,
I quote in Elegiacs, all the crimes of Heliogabulus!
In conics I can floor peculiarities parabolous.
I can tell undoubted Raphaels from Gerard Dows and Zoffanias.
I know the croaking chorus from the “Frogs” of Arisophanes.
Then I can hum a fugue of which I've heard the music's din afore,
And whistle all the airs from that infernal nonsense, *Pinafore*.
Then I can write a washing bill in Babylonian cuneiform,
And tell you ev'ry detail of Caractucacus's uniform.
In short in matters vegetable, animal, and mineral,
I am the very model of a modern Major-General.

In fact, when I know what is meant by “mamelon” and “ravelin;”
When I can tell at sight a Mauser rifle from a javelin;
When such affairs as sorties and surprises I’m more wary at;
And when I know precisely what is meant by commissariat;
When I have learnt what progress has been made in modern gunnery;
When I know more of tactics than a novice in a nunnery;
In short, when I’ve a smattering of elemental strategy –
You’ll say a better Major-General has never sat – a – gee;
For my military knowledge, tho’ I’m plucky
and adventury,
Has only been brought down to the beginning of the century,
But still in matters vegetable, animal, and mineral,
I am the very model of a modern Major-General.

Some Untitled Japanese Poems

1. Lady Otomo No Sanakoe

You say, “I will come,”
And you do not come.
Now you say, “I will not come,”
So I shall expect you.
Have I learned to understand you?

2. Fujiwara No Kiyosuke

I may live on until
I long for this time
In which I am so unhappy,
And remember it fondly

3. Komachi

Imperceptible
It withers in the world,
This flower-like human heart.

4. Narahira

I have always known
That at last I would
Take this road, but yesterday
I did not know that it would be today.

5. Issa

Rainy afternoon . . .
Little daughter, you will never
Teach that cat to dance.

6. Bunya No Asayasu

In a gust of wind the white dew
On the autumn grass
Scatters like a broken necklace

“Epitaph” – William Carlos Williams

An old willow with hollow branches
slowly swayed his few high bright tendrils
and sang:

Love is a young green willow
shimmering at the bare wood’s edge.

“Ozymandias” - Percy Bysshe Shelley

I met a traveler from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal these words appear:
“My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!”
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

“My Live Closed Twice” – Emily Dickinson

My life closed twice before its close –
It yet remains to see –
If Immortality unveil –
A third event to me –

So huge, so hopeless to conceive –
As those that twice befell –
Parting is all we know of heaven –
And all we need of hell.

“The Moon” – Percy Bysshe Shelley

Art thou pale for weariness
Of climbing heaven and gazing on the earth.
Wandering companionless
Among the stars that have a different birth, --
And ever changing, like a joyless eye
That finds no object worth its constancy?

“So, We’ll go No More A-Roving” – George Gordon, Lord Byron

So, we’ll go no more a-roving
So late into the night,
Thought the heart be still as loving,
And the moon be still as bright.

For the sword outwears its sheath,
And the soul wears out the breast,
And the heart must pause to breathe,
And love itself have rest.

Though the night was made for loving,
And the day returns too soon,
Yet we’ll go no more a-roving
By the light of the moon.

“in Just-spring” – e.e. cummings

in Just-
spring when the world is mud-
luscious the little
lame balloonman

whistles far and wee
and eddieandbill come
running from marbles and
piracies and it's
spring

when the world is puddle-wonderful

the queer
old balloonman whistles
far and wee
and bettyand isbel come dancing

and it's spring
and
the
goat-footed

balloonMan whistles
far
and
wee

POETRY SONG PROJECT: Rubric

I. Mechanical elements (50 points)

- A. * name of the song, quoted, and name of the artist (5) __
- * produced by (student names) (5) __
- * page numbers (5) __
- * words at least one inch tall (5) __
- * words both visible and legible (5) __
- * only TWO lines per page (5) __
- * two – seven pictures per page (5) __
- B. * lyrics ACCEPTABLE and APPROPRIATE (5) __
- * lyrics written in song format (5) __
- * lyrics written correctly (spelling, capitalization, etc.) (5) __

II. Aesthetic elements (50 points)

- A. * lyrics illustrated with imagination and insights (10) __
- * lyrics include at least ___ examples of metaphor, simile, personification, imagery, etc. (10) __
- * lyrics represent a good example of poetry set to music (10) __
- B. * project as a whole shows quality workmanship (10) __

Final Grade: _____

Comments:

Poetry Song Projects: Notes

1. Plan this project for the last (or next to last) six weeks of the year. You and the kids can “kick back” and enjoy it. This project works best when assigned as a mostly in-class project. It is suitable for kids from grade 7 up; you may need to adjust time lines and expectations, according to the ages of the kids.
2. Beg, borrow, or “appropriate” as many different types of magazines as possible. Do the same with scissors and glue sticks. I always like to use heavy construction paper for the background. Size is up to you, but the most manageable size seems to be half of an oversize, piece, about 15 inches by 30 inches. Poster board or tag board may also be used, cut in half. The individual pages may be attached with string, yarn, or snap-together notebook rings, available at an office supply store.
3. Allow students to choose their own partners. Of course, kids then have to live with their choices. I sometimes find that one kid will end up doing a project alone, while another will end up doing nothing. You know the drill on this one.
4. This project works best if you SHOW kids an example of a project. If it’s the first year for the project, do one yourself! You will end up with a better idea of the demands made by the parameters you set out. Choose your song, type up the lyrics, gather your magazines, and go to work. On successive years, you may find that some students will let you keep their work. Just get a tape of the song to use with the project.
5. When you assign the project, HAND OUT THE RUBRIC. Kids do a better job if they know precisely what they are expected to do. Then hand out a copy of the lyrics, fire up the tape player, and show your project, exactly as they will be asked to do. Raise one page at a time, as lyrics play.
6. After you show your project, ask kids for their questions. The inevitable question will arise: “Can I do a rap song?” The answer is that students MAY do rap songs, but do they really want to take on that amount of work? I have found that rap songs contain roughly FOUR TO EIGHT TIMES the number of words found in “regular” songs. Usually a kid will say he / she wants to do a rap song, then has to hand in lyrics, and starts comparing the number of pages needed to do the job to the tasks of kids who have used more traditional songs. At that point, the rap song is usually abandoned.

7. Some artists whose songs usually prove successful include many “moldy oldies” like the Eagles: I have seen several really good depictions of “Hotel California.” Other good choices range from Jewel, Alanis Morissette, Faith Hill, Garth Brooks, and Toby Keith to the Wallflowers. Some of the heavy metal groups have suitable songs too. As remarked above, the rap songs don’t usually work very well, although I have seen a few that were successful.

8. When you assign the project, assign a timeline. I suggest that you give kids two weeks to turn in lyrics. I have a nasty, suspicious nature: I require kids to set up a “tutoring” appointment with me. At that time, they must hand me a neatly written or typed copy of the lyrics. I have a tape player / CD player handy. Students must play the song as I read the lyrics. If I feel that the lyrics are not suitable, I tell them at that time. (On several occasions, I have had kids come to me with an album jacket and ask me to “prejudge” the lyrics. If the lyrics aren’t suitable, I tell them before they invest any time.)

9. Set up a reasonable date for completion. I usually give kids three to five class days to work on projects, spread out over two to three weeks. Students may choose to work on their own time as well. Then, on the due date, I take up ALL projects, including the joined posters and the tape of the song. I do a “spot check” for suitable lyrics on each project.

10. The day that I take up projects, I post a sign-up sheet. Students must then sign up to present the projects at the beginning of each period, no more than two a day. Take my word for it: you will NOT want to listen to songs all period for a week or more.

11. The attached grading rubric is provided for planning purposes. I left the number of poetic devices required blank; it’s necessary to adjust that point, depending on the age of the kids involved. I have also, depending on the class, adjusted the rubric so that content counts much more heavily than mechanics.