

Lesson Plan for High Schoolers: *The Life and Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Source: https://www.educationworld.com/a_tsl/archives/04-1/lesson038.shtml)

Objective:

- Students will identify characteristics of Emily Dickinson
- Students will relate identified characteristics of Emily Dickinson to interpretations of her poems.

Materials:

- Picture of Emily Dickinson (visual aid)
- Handout of Emily Dickinson's biography
 - [Emily Dickinson](#)
- Handouts of Emily Dickinson's poems
- Writing utensils and paper

Warm Up

1. Show students the picture of Emily Dickinson and ask if anyone knows who is pictured. Once she has been identified, ask students to share anything they may know about her.
2. Explain to students that in order to understand her poetry, they must understand her life. Ask: "Can anyone explain why it might be important to know about the life of a poet before exploring his or her poetry?"
 - a. Answer: it is important because most of what a poet writes is reflective of their own lives, regardless of whether or not they are the speaker in the poem. In order to fully grasp the concepts the poet is presenting, it is essential to understand the background of the poet.
3. Have students read the biography of Emily Dickinson and then identify characteristics they learned from the reading.
 - a. Examples: family oriented, isolated, alone, lonely, longing for happiness, not publicly recognized, content with who she was, etc.

Activity

1. Pass out a copy of the Dickinson poem "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" Ask students to read the poem to themselves and think about the characteristics of Dickinson that relate to the poem.
2. Discuss Dickinson's characteristics that are reflected in the words of the poem. Start with dissecting the first stanza, then continue to the second stanza
3. Pass out a copy of "Pain—has an Element of Blank". Instead of discussing Dickinson's characteristics, have students think to themselves about their own lives. Have students write a sentence or two to describe what characteristics of Dickinson they observe in the words of the poem and what the poem means to them. If there are volunteers, have them share what they have written.
4. Lastly, group students to discuss "My Life closed twice before its close". Walk around and observe students' conversations about the poem. Are they able to interpret the poem based on what they know about Dickinson's life?

Follow Up Activity/Assessment (Optional)

1. Tell students they will be writing in class tomorrow as a follow-up activity. You might share the assignment ahead of time so they can be thinking about it:
 - a. Ask students to write a brief biography about their own lives (only about 3-4 paragraphs) and then write a 2-3 stanza poem that is reflective of their own lives.
 - i. You might work on this follow up activity/project over a couple class sessions.
2. Now that you have modeled interpreting poems of Dickinson based on what is known of her life, have students work independently to interpret another of her poems "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain". Challenge them to interpret what Dickinson is conveying in the lines of the poem and to link the language of poem to the biographical information they have learned about her.

Lesson Plan 2: *What is Poetry?* (Source: <http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/what-poetry-contrasting-poetry-30738.html?tab=4>)

Objective:

Students will:

- Develop an understanding of the structure of a poem (i.e. consider the title; understand punctuation, line breaks, stanzas, enjambment, syntax)
- Develop deeper comprehension skills by doing a close reading of a poem
- Develop critical thinking skills, understanding how an author's purpose differs for different texts, by contrasting poetry and prose
- Understand that reading poetry requires a different stance and set of reading strategies

Materials

- Writing utensils and paper
- Computer/projector
- "Unfolding Bud" by Naoshi Koriyama
- "'Hope' is the thing with feathers" by Emily Dickinson

Warm Up

1. Ask students to quick-write for five minutes in response to the prompt "What is poetry?" Instruct them to brainstorm any words, phrases, feelings, or associations that come to mind when thinking about poetry.
2. Provide time for discussion recording students' responses on computer. (You will revisit these responses at the end of the lesson.)
 - a. Note: many students will have misconceptions about what poetry is. They often associate poetry only with feelings, believe poetry holds hidden meaning evident only to experts, and assume that poems always rhyme.
3. Remind students that different types of text need to be approached with different expectations and strategies. Share an example such as reading a newspaper article versus reading a novel. Explain that we read these texts for different reasons and therefore, we adjust our reading speed and strategies.
 - a. Newspaper—more skimming and looking at the headlines
 - b. Novel—read more critically, asking questions, looking for patterns, rereading for understanding, etc.
4. Explain that poetry also requires a close reading. In addition, although we used many of the same strategies required when reading any text (i.e. previewing the text, visualizing, setting a purpose, asking questions), reading poetry requires new strategies and expectations. These will become apparent during this lesson.

Activity

1. Project the poem "Unfolding Bud" by Naoshi Koriyama. Ask students to consider the title of the poem and make predictions about its content. (Students will likely predict it is a poem about flowers.) Tell them to follow along as you read it aloud to model how to read a poem with attention to punctuation and line breaks.

2. Using your prepared questions, lead a discussion about the poem that helps students uncover the main idea. It is unlikely that students will “get” the poem upon first reading, but emphasize that this demonstrates the first crucial lesson about reading poetry: most poetry requires several close, word-for-word readings and deep analysis to unlock meaning.
3. Have students record vocabulary words such as “stanza”, “personification”, “free verse”, etc.
4. Hand out copies of Emily Dickinson’s poem “Hope is the thing with feathers”. Read the poem aloud with your class and have the students point out where the above vocabulary

Closing Discussion

- Revisit the students’ responses of poetry during the warmup of this lesson. Ask the students if they feel differently about poetry and want to change their response.
- *For further reading, more poetry recommendations can be found in the Additional Resources/Media Room (Pg. __).

Additional Resources/Media Room:

- Before I Got My Eye Put Out – The Poetry of Emily Dickinson: Crash Course English Lit #8 (John Green) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4WwhOdk_Eg
- Brain Pop: Emily Dickinson: <https://www.brainpop.com/english/writing/emilydickinson/>
- 24 Must-Share Poems for Middle School and High School: <https://www.weareteachers.com/24-must-share-poems-for-middle-school-and-high-school/>
- Emily Dickinson Museum: <https://www.emilydickinsonmuseum.org/>

Vocabulary (?):

- Alliteration: The repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words.
 - *Moby moved mountains of maroon marmots.*
- Assonance: The repetition of vowel sounds.
 - *She leaves green tweezers on the street.*
- Ballad: A story told in verse, usually with a repeated refrain. Ballads are often about folk heroes, adventures, or historical events.
- Blank verse: A form of poetry, often written in iambic pentameter, that does not rhyme. The most famous examples are *Paradise Lost* by John Milton, and the plays of William Shakespeare
- Consonance: The repetition of consonant sounds in the beginning, middle or end of words, like “leaf” and “loaf”, “blank” and “think”, and “borrow” and “sparrow”.
- Couplet: A pair of lines that rhyme.
 - *I think that I shall never see//A poem as lovely as a tree.*
- Elegy: A sad or thoughtful poem, often lamenting someone’s death.
- Hyperbole: A literary technique in which the writer makes her point through exaggeration.
 - *I’m so hungry I could eat a horse!*
- Internal rhyme: Rhyming words or phrases that occur within the same line or in the middles of two separate lines.
 - *Rita wants to eat a pita*
- Onomatopoeia: When a word is used to imitate a sound.
 - *Slam! Buzz! Cock a doodle do!*
- Sonnet: A poem that is 14 lines long and that utilizes one of two specific meters and rhyme schemes.
- Meter: The rhythmic structure of poetry.
- Feet: A line of poetry
- Iamb: a type of metrical foot that is an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable.
 - *Having trouble identifying an iamb? It follows the rhythm of a heartbeat: “da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM”*
 - *“collapse”, “predict”, “belong”, “we played”*
- Iambic Pentameter: a line with five iambs strung together.
- Blank verse: unrhymed iambic pentameter
- Free verse: follows no specific rhythmic pattern.