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Teaching Different Perspectives Through Poetry

Poetry classes can seem intimidating for some students because they think they have to follow certain rules and restrictions. Poetry however does not have to be an intimidating subject for students. If the subject is approached in a fun and interactive way the students will be more willing to learn the subject material.

Many teachers focus strictly on analysis of the classic poems however I chose to incorporate modern poems with similar themes as well as many interactive creative writing poetry exercises so the students can have a hands on experience with poetry.

The theme of my overall unit is to teach the students that there are many different perspectives and opinions in life, and that they should all be respected. I will be using Robert Frost poems in order to incorporate this theme by analyzing “Fire and Ice” and “The Road Not Taken”. Both of these poems use rhyme schemes and form to convey the different perspectives in life. I will also incorporate some Shakespeare into the unit by doing a readers theater of “Macbeth”. “Macbeth” will be used to show the greedy perspective of some people and the extent to which some people will go for money. This will also allow the students to get familiar with the form of the sonnet, couplets, and also iambic pentameter. Overall this unit will show the students that everyone sees things differently. People can look at one thing and see different things that others may not have seen.

I will also teach free verse poetry in order to show the many different varieties of poetry. The students will have a chance to be creative and write their own poems so that they can have a more hands on experience with the materials. The students will learn that poetry does not have to be written in a strict format but instead can be in whatever form the author chooses. They will explore the endless possibilities in poetry in order to enhance their experience and make the unit more fun in a creative way.

* I will start the unit with a fun interactive exercise. I will pass out papers with rap lyrics from modern rap songs and poetry lines from Norton anthologized poems and ask the class to vote on which line is a rap lyric and which is a poetry line. I will explain the connection between the classic poets and the modern day rappers that the students listen to. This will help engage the students’ interest in poetry.
* Then I would introduce “Introduction to Poetry” by Billy Collins. After reading the poem I will have the students list all the poetry terms, rules, and restrictions they have previously learned or have heard of and write them on the white board. Then I would discuss free verse poetry and explain that poetry does not have to be confined and restricted to any certain rules.
* In order to give the students a more hands on experience with poetry I will give them a creative writing assignment. I will pass out a picture to everyone in the class and have them write a free verse poem based on the picture. Everyone will be given the same picture to work from but everyone’s poem should be unique and different. After they are finished writing I will have the students get into groups of 3 and discuss their poems. This exercise will help them realize that even though the picture was the same some people perceive the picture differently than others.
* Next I will introduce blackout poetry. Black out poetry is taking someone else’s writing and removing the words you don’t want in your poem. The remaining words that have not been removed or crossed out will make up your poem. I will pass out newspapers to each student and have them choose an article for the blackout exercise. I will have each student pick an article and create his or her own blackout poem.
* We will then focus on sonnets, couplets, and iambic pentameter while looking at Shakespeare’s play “Macbeth”. The students will be assigned certain roles and be asked to perform a reader’s theater during class. After the readers theater the students will write a 1-2 page response on the greedy nature of people and they will be asked to rewrite the ending of “Macbeth”.

**Centerpiece:**

I will open with the poem by Robert Frost, “Fire and Ice”. We will read the poem in class and then analyze the meaning of the poem. The students will be asked to write a sustained silent writing entry in which they choose whether they believe the world will end in fire or ice and why, and also explain what they believe the fire and the ice symbolize in the poem. This poem will help to highlight the importance of different perspectives and ideas.

Next we will read “The Road Not Taken” and analyze as a class the meaning behind the poem. I will have them identify and scan the rhythmic pattern throughout the poem. Then I will have them identify which rhyming scheme is being used. The students will then write a silent sustained writing about what the poem means to them and have them decide which path they would take.

As a class we will read “A Total Stranger One Black Day” by E.E. Cummings. I will then lecture about the different points of view. We will discuss first person, second person and third person point of view. The students will then write poems in the first person reflecting on them personally. The second poem they write must be in second person and the third poem must be in third person as well. This poetry exercise will let the students explore the use of different points of view and how they can each evoke different emotions.

**Concluding the Unit: Final Project**

The final will be composed of quotes from each poem we have discussed in the classroom and the students must identify the title, author, and poetic devices used in the particular poem. After they have identified the poems they will be asked to compare and contrast the two Robert Frost poems. The students must connect their ideas to the overall theme of the unit: different perspectives. Their response must be at least 1-2 pages in length and incorporate their new poetic vocabulary terms. Lastly the students will be given famous couplets from Shakespeare and asked to scan the couplets and label which ones are using iambic pentameter.

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