

Poetry Workshop

Teacher's Packet

A KET professional development workshop for educators approved for Professional Development Training by the Kentucky Department of Education.

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Poetry Workshop

Tuesday, April 8, 1997

4:00-5:30 pm ET/3:00-4:30 pm CT

Introduction to the Seminar

What can you do when the mere mention of poetry elicits groans from students? This workshop answers that question by providing positive strategies that help students (even the reluctant ones) develop poems while promoting a better understanding of the characteristics and types of poetry. Featuring Starr Lewis of the Kentucky Writing Program and high school teacher Dewey Hensley, the seminar explores such topics as teaching students to distinguish between concrete and abstract; using precise descriptive words; comparing the process of revising poetry with the process of revising prose; and suggestions for assessing poems.

About the Teacher Packet

This packet includes a seminar agenda, biographies of the host and presenter, and materials related to program content. Check the table of contents on page 4 for more specifics.

Materials Needed for Participation

Please bring the following items with you when you view the videotape:

- Your copy of this packet
- Pencil
- Paper

Seminar Format & Components

Poetry Workshop was originally produced live. To make this 90-minute presentation as active and useful as possible, it includes:

- **site activities.** From time to time during the seminar, the presenters may lead you through an activity or provide directions for an activity you and your colleagues can conduct at the site.
- **videotaped classroom visits.** This component gives you the opportunity to visit other teachers' classrooms and see their techniques and strategies first hand.

Professional Development Credit

Stage of Participant Development: Practice/Application

The Kentucky Department of Education has approved all KET Star Channels Seminars for professional development credit if schools or districts choose to include them in their professional development plans. Districts or schools may choose to include preparation and/or follow-up time as part of professional development. For example, if a teacher participates in one 90-minute program and spends an additional 30 minutes in related activities, he or she could be awarded a total of two hours professional development credit.

Individual teachers who wish to use these videotapes for professional development credit should check with their school professional development chair or with their district professional development coordinator.

Professional development can also be used to satisfy requirements for the fifth year program. Contact your local university or the Division of Teacher Education and Certification at 502-564-4606 for more information.

Packet Contents

• Seminar Presenters	5
• Seminar Agenda	6
• Mini-Lesson: Poetry—Abstract vs. Concrete	7
• Mini-Lesson: Poetry—Communicating an Idea	8
• Samples: Writer’s Notebook Entry and Poem	9
• Revision Questions for Poetry	11
• Samples: Drafts of “The Lighthouse”	12
• Models for Teaching Poetry	16
• Acknowledgments	17

Seminar Host and Presenter

Host **Starr Lewis** is currently the director of the Kentucky Writing Program. She has also served as a writing portfolio consultant for the Kentucky Department of Education and as a regional writing resource teacher. Starr's background includes 17 years of experience teaching high school English and psychology in Bullitt County, Kentucky. She has a degree in secondary education from the University of Kentucky and a master's in education from the University of Louisville.

Presenter **Dewey Hensley** teaches high school English at South Oldham High School in Crestwood, Kentucky. Before taking his present position, he taught English and served as head basketball coach at Eminence High School. Dewey also taught at Fairdale High School in Louisville. His other professional activities include serving as assistant director of the Louisville Writing Project, conducting training sessions for the Kentucky Association of School Administrators, and serving as a table leader for portfolio analysis and as on-demand writing test writer for the Kentucky Department of Education. Dewey has a B.A in English and philosophy from Berea College and a master's in English from the University of Louisville.

Seminar Agenda

Welcome and overview of the seminar

Starr Lewis, Host

Concrete vs. abstract

Dewey Hensley, Presenter

The role of descriptive language in poetry

Taking concrete language from prose and turning it into poetry

Revising poetry vs. revising prose

Scoring poetry

Starr Lewis and Dewey Hensley

General discussion of teaching poetry

Concluding remarks

Starr Lewis

Mini-Lesson Plan: Poetry Abstract vs. Concrete

Dewey Hensley

Purpose: Students often recognize the fact that poetry examines a writer’s emotions, beliefs, or experiences and they see that it also deals with universal ideas and ideals that are complex and intangible; however, students fail to see that poetry gets to these abstract ideas through symbols, metaphors, and similes based in the tangible “things” in our world. This often causes student poems to be abstract creations that say little to the reader. Their work is void of the concrete images and sensory details, as well as the metaphorical aspects, the best poetry offers. Ultimately, their purpose is to rhyme, not communicate to an audience. This lesson challenges students to distinguish between abstractions and concrete images and illustrates how in poetry, “a picture is worth a thousand words.”

Class Discussion: Explain the meaning of the words “tangible” and “intangible.” With my students I often say intangible things are those we cannot detect with our senses or “put in our pockets.” Then write the following words on the board and tell students that abstract things are intangible, while concrete things are very tangible.

(Guide students as they create lists like these below:)

Abstract	Concrete
Justice	Desk
Fear	Pencil
Love	Chair
Faith	Paper
Belief	Breeze
Courage	Tree
Life	River
Dreams	Glass

Handout: After students do this, show them some examples of poetic lines that take abstract ideas and turn them into concrete images. Here are some samples or sources:

1. “Love is a bittersweet stain; ever widening, it colors our lives
If we can stand the pain, then we can hold the happiness.”
2. “A Dream Deferred” by Langston Hughes
3. “Fear, when you are young, is like a candle that burns fast.
It melts away
as you learn each day,
until the flame has passed.”

Task for Students: Have students, in their journals or as a writing exercise, choose to . . .

1. Write a two-line poem or more in which you take an abstract idea and “show” it by using a concrete image.
2. Take a concrete thing and turn it into another concrete image.

Mini-Lesson: Poetry Communicating an Idea

Dewey Hensley

Purpose: Students often use abstract language in their poetry because they think it communicates their ideas more directly. When reading poetry, students often say “Why does the poet have to use all these words? Why don’t they just say what is on their mind?” It is important for students to see that poetic imagery often has layers of meaning that abstract language cannot reveal. In this short lesson, students will see how getting straight to the point sometimes fails to capture the depth and complexity of an idea.

Class Activity:

A. Write the following statement on the board:

Love is great.

- Ask students to help you list what this tells a reader about “Love” . . .
- Their response should be quite limited to words like “it is good and wonderful.”

B. Write the following line of poetry on the board:

Love is like a red, red rose.

- Ask students to tell you what this line of poetry tells you about “Love” . . .
- To add some drama to the lesson, hand out a rose to the class . . . have them pass it around the room and write in their journals the connections they see between the flower and “love.”

My students gave responses like these: “It is beautiful,” “It can be painful because of the thorns,” “It has many petals and layers,” and “It wilts and can die if you don’t take care of it.”

At this point you can use models to further display ideas. A good model is Robert Frost’s “The Road Not Taken.”

Writing Practice for Students: Ask students to write in their notebooks about an object that symbolizes something about them or one of their feelings. It can be in poetic form (a simile like the line above) or it can be in paragraph form. Either way, they should be prepared to share with the class. This can serve as the prewriting or initial drafting of the poem.

[Editor's Note: The student work below is in response to Dewey Hensley's "found" poetry lesson.]

Writer's Notebook Entry

I can still remember running along the hills and turns of McNeeley Lake. The hot summer sun on my shoulders, I would push myself along the pavement and the grass until the lines between the two were lost, a blending of green and black and sweat. During these runs I sometimes took bread, stored inside my blue running shorts waistband, to share with the ducks swimming upon the water. Their ripples made circles on the lake and they were. Sometime there, I felt more free than I had ever felt; it was as if I could run forever and nothing could contain me. I eventually felt that I escaped the park and lake and I could make my own circles in the sky.

But soon my legs would tire and the gulps of air were not enough and the sweat would no longer extinguish the fire of my skin. I would contain myself. The burden of my body would make my spirit tired and soon I could hear the sirens call me back to the black pavement, the green grass, the dark circles dancing across the lake and people and promises; called back to earth by the voices of a summer day.

Voice of a Summer Day

Running
along the hills and turns
of
McNeeley Lake.
Hot sun on my shoulders
Push myself along
pavement
grass
until the lines between the two were
lost,
a blending of
green
and
black
and
sweat.
Bread in my waistband
to share with
ducks
their ripples
circles upon the water.

I felt more free
I could run forever,
nothing could contain me,
I escaped the park and lake
to make my own circles
in the sky.

But soon my legs would tire
gulps of air were not enough
sweat
would no longer extinguish the fire
I would contain myself.
The burden . . .
my body.

I could hear sirens call me back to
black pavement
green grass
dark circles dancing across the water
and promises . . .
all
voices of a summer day.

Revision Questions for Poetry

Dewey Hensley

Purpose: Students must learn that when they do a first draft of a poem, it is subject to revision just like any prose work they might create. Often they are more careful choosing the words for a poem; thus, they do not want to “mess” with it at all. As teachers, we must help them recognize that poetry goes through the writing process just like any other transactive writing. Furthermore, they need to understand that poetry is a part of their portfolio; it is scored by the same criteria as their personal narrative or letter to the reviewer. A poem must have “Purpose and Audience,” details that develop the idea for the reader, an organization that the reader can follow, purposeful manipulation of sentence characteristics, word choice, and the intentional control over correctness issues. The following revision questions enable the writer and/or the writer’s peers to examine poems in light of the scoring guide.

Revision Questions for Poetry

1. What is the “purpose” of the poem?
 - Express an abstract idea?*
 - Show an image?*
 - Characterize a person?*
 - Other?*
2. Is there a common thread you can follow?
Or are all the lines separate from each other?*
3. Are there any “unpoetic” words or words that do not fit the tone of the poem?
4. Is it in a form that fits the poem’s meaning and use of sentences or sentence fragments?
5. Are there any “unintentional” punctuation or spelling errors?

*It is possible to rephrase these questions or add to them so that they better reflect the scoring guide.

[Editor's Note: The draft stages of the following poem illustrate the process of revising a poem.]

Draft 1

The Lighthouse
(for _____)

I am not a lighthouse,
nor am I the coral reef.
The ships come in and out again
and I am what they see;
I illuminate, demonstrate,
explicate
and navigate
with my hands,
But I am not the lighthouse,
I cannot shine upon all the sands
If I could,
I would save them all.
The tide comes in and out again,
And I am there each fall,
But I am not the lighthouse.
I must not be the coral reef,
an obstacle upon the shore.
My place is to make ships free,
not hold them to the ocean's floor.
It is I who is the watcher at the sea.
But I am not the lighthouse.

The Lighthouse
(for _____)

I am only the lighthouse,
just the watcher by the sea

The ships come in and out again
and I am what they see;
I illuminate, demonstrate,
explicate and navigate
I embrace with open hands
Yet I am but the lighthouse,
I cannot shine upon all the sands
If I could,

I would save them all.
The tide comes in and out again,
And I am there each fall,
the watcher by the sea,
But I am only the lighthouse.
A guide for them to heed.

I must not be the coral reef,
an obstacle upon the shore.
My place is to make the ships free
not hold them to the ocean's floor.
It is I who is the watcher at the sea.
Yet each season you can hear me weeping
The rocks are there and though I am the beacon

I can
but stand
the watcher by the sea

I am just the lighthouse.
It is all that I can be.

The Lighthouse
(for _____)

I am just the lighthouse,
the watcher by the sea

The ships come in and out again
and I am what they see;
I illuminate, demonstrate,
explicate, navigate
I embrace with glowing arms and hands,
Yet I am just the lighthouse,
I cannot shine upon all the sands . . .

If I could,
I would save them all.
The tide comes in and out again,
And I am there each fall,
a guide for them to heed.
But I am just the lighthouse,
the watcher by the sea.

I must not be the coral reef,
an obstacle jagged near the shore.
My place is to make ships free
not hold them to the ocean's floor.
I stand proud, a sentinel with no key

And each season you can hear me weeping
The rocks are there and though I am the beacon
I can
but stand
to shine, and guide, and turn and lead. (plead)

But I am just the lighthouse.
the watcher by the sea.

The Lighthouse
(for _____)

I am just the lighthouse,
the watcher by the sea.

The ships come in and out again
and I am what they see;
I illuminate, demonstrate,
explicate, navigate
I embrace with glowing arms and hands,
Yet I am just the lighthouse,
A pale, dim reminder of rocks and sands.

If I could,
I would save them all.
The tide comes in and out again,
And I am there each fall,
a guide for them to heed.
But I am just the lighthouse,
the watcher by the sea.

I must not be the coral reef,
an obstacle, jagged, near the shore.
My place is to make ships free
not hold them to the ocean's floor.
I stand my ground, a sentinel with no key
a tall white thin shroud
the fog encompasses even me.

And each season you can hear my sirens weeping
The rocks are there and though I am the beacon
I can
but stand
to shine, and guide, and turn and plead . . .

But I am just the lighthouse,
the watcher by the sea.

Models for Teaching Poetry

Dewey Hensley uses the poems listed below to model the use of concrete descriptive language when he is teaching poetry. All six poems appear in Dunning, Lueders, and Smith's *Reflections on a Gift of Watermelon Pickle and Other Modern Verse*.

William J. Smith, "The Toaster"

Charles Malam, "Steam Shovel"

Beatrice Janosco, "The Garden Hose"

Gerald Raftery, "Apartment House"

Robert Burns, "A Red, Red Rose"

Randall Jarrell, "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner"

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