

High School English Lesson Plan: Poetry

Introduction

Each lesson in the Adolescent Literacy Toolkit is designed to support students through the reading/learning process by providing instruction before, during, and after reading/learning.

Note that lessons incorporate the *gradual release of responsibility* model. When this model is used within a single lesson and over several lessons, students are provided with enough instruction and guidance to use the literacy strategies on their own. The following lesson includes some examples of explicit instruction and modeling, guided practice, and independent practice, but students need more practice and feedback than is possible within the context of a single lesson.

Bold print indicates a direct link to the *Content Area Literacy Guide* where readers will find descriptions of literacy strategies, step-by-step directions for how to use each strategy, and quadrant charts illustrating applications across the four core content disciplines.

The following lesson plan and lesson narrative show English teachers how they can incorporate the use of literacy strategies to support high school students to learn content and concepts related to the study of poetry. The lesson is designed for one block period (80–90 minutes) or two traditional classes (50 minutes).

Instructional Outcomes

NCTE Standards: 1. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions of human experience. 2. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts.

Content Learning Outcome: Students will practice visualizing, analyzing, and responding to poetic language, including how poets use conventions like imagery, figurative language, and symbols to appeal to both the intellect and the senses.

Literacy Support Strategies and Instruction

Before reading/learning: **Visualization** (modeling and whole group practice) and **Save the Last Word for Me** (modeling)

- Materials: Chalk/markers and board/chart paper for students to write on, chart paper for poetic conventions

During reading/learning: **Save the Last Word for Me** (individual preparation and modeling)

- Materials: Index cards (or plain copy paper folded into four quadrants), copy of the poem *Abandoned Farmhouse* by Ted Kooser, and text copy of poem on overhead

After reading/learning: **Save the Last Word for Me** (small group practice)

- Materials: Index cards, copy of the poem, and paper and pen for the note taker in each group

Before Reading/Learning (20 minutes)

Literacy outcome: Students will use visualization to connect the power of language to evoke images and aesthetic responses in relation to the reading of poetry.

Teacher facilitation:

- 1) At the beginning of the poetry unit, tell students they will be focusing on visualization and personal response as they discuss poems.
- 2) Tell students they will be discussing a poem called *Abandoned Farmhouse*. Ask students to close their eyes for 30 seconds and form a picture of what an abandoned farmhouse might look like. Prompt students to think about the sensory details—the sounds, smells, sights, things they might touch or taste—that come to mind when they visualize an abandoned farmhouse. At the end of the 30 seconds, invite students to do a *Chalk Talk*, silently taking turns writing a word on the board that describes their images of an abandoned farmhouse. Then lead a short discussion of the *Chalk Talk* to help consolidate thinking about this image and formulate a group prediction for the poem they are about to discuss.
- 3) Review these four poetic conventions: figurative language, imagery, symbols, and tone, eliciting definitions and examples from students. Record the terms, definitions, and examples on chart paper to be used as a reference throughout the lesson. Clarify terms and elaborate on examples as needed.

During Reading/Learning (35 minutes)

Literacy outcome: Students will read a poem closely, noting lines that prompted images or provoked a sensory response in them and articulating the reason behind the image or response.

Teacher facilitation:

- 1) Tell students they will be reading and then discussing the poem using a strategy called **Save the Last Word for Me**. Students will be identifying lines that create a particularly strong image or response. Using the overhead projector, show the first four lines of the poem:

"Abandoned Farmhouse" by Ted Kooser

He was a big man, says the size of his shoes
on a pile of broken dishes by the house;
a tall man too, says the length of the bed
in an upstairs room;

- 2) Read the first four lines of the first stanza aloud to the class. Model how you would identify a powerful image and a sensory response that resonated strongly with you as you interpreted the four lines.
- 3) Reveal the last four lines of the stanza on the overhead. Ask students to read these lines and select one they think is easy to visualize in their heads or one that provokes some sort of emotional or sensory response in them.

and a good, God-fearing man,
says the Bible with a broken back
on the floor below the window, dusty with sun;
but not a man for farming, say the fields
cluttered with boulders and the leaky barn.

- 4) Ask four students to come up to the front of the room with their chairs and their note cards. Tell the four students they are going to help you demonstrate how **Save the Last Word for Me** works, sharing an image or sensory response that resonated with them in the first stanza. Tell the other students to watch closely because these students are going to help you model what you want everyone to do.
- 5) Tap one student on the shoulder and ask him/her to read one of the vivid lines s/he selected but not to share why the line was selected. Tap the student to the left and ask the student to respond to the line selected and read by the first student. Suggest that this might be a personal response, an interpretation of what the line means, or the type of figurative language the line uses. Listen to the second person respond to the line selected by the first. Then ask the third and fourth students to each take a turn responding to the same line. Explain that the person who originally shared the line then explains *why* s/he selected it and how s/he thinks the poet uses language to create the power of the line. Ask the first student to do this and listen to the response. Thank the students and ask them to return to their seats.
- 6) Tell the students that this is why the protocol is called **Save the Last Word for Me**. Explain that a “round” is complete when all four people have shared one of their cards and had the opportunity to have the last word. Reinforce that it is okay if more than one student selects the same line because they might have different reasons to do so. Group members should add to their earlier comments, or repeat them if this is the case, and should discuss why this line is so powerful.
- 7) Debrief the student modeling to clarify the process for the class.
- 8) Discuss with the class how listening to the group use the strategy helped them make meaning of or get the gist of the first stanza of the poem. Ask a few students to share their thinking aloud with the group.
- 9) Hand out copies of the poem and four index cards. Ask students to record as they read, on one side of each card, a line or lines that generate a powerful image or sensory response like you just modeled with the line you selected. Ask students to note the stanza (2 or 3) where the line is found. On the other side of each card, students should write down why they selected that line and how the author used figurative language, imagery, symbols, or tone to make this image powerful. Each student should fill out two cards for each stanza. Note that an image or reaction might be powerful because of a personal response, but ask students to also think about how the poet uses language to provoke a response.
- 10) Tell students they will be using their cards as the basis for a conversation with fellow students in small groups of four using the **Save the Last Word for Me** protocol when they have finished reading the poem and recording their thinking on the index cards.

After Reading/Learning (35 minutes)

Literacy outcome: Students will use a collaborative discussion protocol to share their responses to the poem in small groups and analyze how the use of poetic language in a poem enhances the intellectual or emotional power of the text.

Teacher facilitation:

- 1) Divide students into small groups of four and ask each group to follow the same protocol. The group should decide who is going to start and they should complete two “rounds” with the cards.
- 2) When the groups have completed their two rounds (one round for stanzas two and three, respectively), ask each group to select a note taker for the group to write down the lines selected for **Save the Last Word for Me** by group members (one line per person with no repeats for each stanza). Then the group should work together to complete a group **Quick Write** responding to the following:
 - Using the types of figurative language conventions listed on the board or chart paper earlier in the lesson, the group should discuss what type of language convention each selected line represents. They should identify which lines are examples of the four types of language convention. The note taker should record the group consensus for what type of language convention is associated with each selected line.
 - The group should discuss what they think is the gist of each stanza—what the poet is trying to convey. The note taker should record the group consensus for the gist of each stanza.
 - The group should discuss what they think happened to the family. The note taker should record the group’s conjecture as to “what went wrong.”
 - These completed **Quick Writes** provide valuable data for teacher reflection and should not be graded. The student responses should be used to assess student learning and make decisions about next lessons.
- 3) At the end of the class, bring students back together into the large group and elicit how they liked using the **Save the Last Word for Me** strategy to work with a poem and how the strategy affected their ability to understand or engage with the poem.

Suggested Subsequent Lessons

Students can repeat the use of **Save the Last Word for Me** with other poems to identify and discuss lines that provoke strong imagery or response and analyze language use in increasingly difficult poems. Eventually, students should be able to identify on their own how poetic conventions contribute to the interest, imagery, and memorable impact upon the reader.

High School English Lesson Narrative: Poetry

Teachers: As you read the lesson narrative, think about the following questions. You may want to discuss them with fellow English language arts teachers.

- *What does the teacher do to support students' literacy development and content learning before, during, and after reading/learning?*
- *What challenges do you anticipate if you were to implement this lesson in your own classroom? How would you prepare to meet these challenges?*
- *How would you make improvements to this lesson?*

Ms. Snow wondered how she could engage her students in visualizing and engaging with poetry without making it seem like an academic exercise or classroom drudgery. She had read *Abandoned Farmhouse* last April during Poetry Month and thought it might be intriguing to some of the reluctant students as it was short in length, used ordinary language, and had a puzzling ending. She thought it would be a good way to introduce the unit. She could initially focus on visualization and how poets use language to create powerful lines. She decided to try out a collaborative discussion strategy another teacher had mentioned called **Save the Last Word for Me**.

Before Reading/Learning

Ms. Snow wrote the words *abandoned farmhouse* on the board as her class filed in and sat down. Once her students settled into their desks, she asked them to close their eyes and for 30 seconds form a picture in their minds of an abandoned farmhouse. "Remember to use sensory details to make the image more vivid. What do you see, hear, smell," there were a few giggles, "feel, and taste?" She paused in silence. "Keep that image and find a word that describes the abandoned farmhouse you visualized. We'll do a silent *Chalk Talk*. For the next two or three minutes, when you see a free piece of chalk, you can go up to the board and write your word. If your word relates to one that has already been written, draw a line that connects them." Afterwards, Ms. Snow led a discussion of the words students recorded during the *Chalk Talk*. She asked students to note words they particularly liked and to determine why these words provoked a positive response. Then she solicited student ideas as to what a poem titled *Abandoned Farmhouse* might be about.

Ms. Snow divided a piece of chart paper into four sections and wrote one of these terms in each section: figurative language, imagery, symbols, and tone. She explained that each of these words is a convention of something that poets use to create images in the reader's mind or to prompt feelings in the reader. She asked students which terms were familiar to them. Several hands went up and Ms. Snow called on Erin, a new student in her class. Erin said, "We were talking about symbols yesterday in my history class and symbols are things that represent another idea, like the flag represents your country and patriotism, or like a peace sign represents solving problems without the use of violence." Ms. Snow affirmed Erin's definition and examples and recorded them on the chart paper. She added that an important part of learning is to make connections between ideas, and symbols are used in all academic areas and throughout our culture. Bob, an avid gamer said, "Yeah, like when you see an apple with a bite out of it, you always think of Apple computers or iPods. Oh, and I think I know what imagery is, because the root word is 'image' and that's like a picture or visual, something you can see like a mountain or beach." Ms. Snow recorded Bob's definition on the chart paper and continued the discussion until the chart was complete. Once all the terms had been discussed and clarified, she explained that the chart would be posted on the wall for reference throughout the lesson.

During Reading/Learning

Using the overhead, Ms. Snow projected the first four lines of the poem on the wall. She informed the class that Ted Kooser served as poet laureate for the United States, which is the highest national honor for a living poet. She went on to read the first four lines aloud to the class.

“Abandoned Farmhouse, by Ted Kooser

He was a big man, says the size of his shoes

on a pile of broken dishes by the house;

a tall man too, says the length of the bed

in an upstairs room; and a good, God-fearing man,”

Ms. Snow thought aloud, “Hmmm, I see a big man with big feet and he has talking shoes. Now I am pretty sure that no has invented talking shoes, so the poet is giving the shoes human qualities which we call personification. I’m wondering why the poet chose to make the shoes and bed talk. That’s curious and makes me want to read on. Also, it says the man was a good, God-fearing man and that makes me think he is honest and ethical—that he has good values. That makes me feel like he must be a good person in the way he thinks and the way he acts. Do you see how the language Ted Kooser used helped me to visualize and respond to the poem?” Most students were nodding affirmatively. “We will read the next four lines and this time a few students will share how they interpreted images and responses. Now I’ll show you the next four lines and read them to you.

“says the Bible with a broken back

on the floor below the window, dusty with sun;

but not a man for farming, say the fields

cluttered with boulders and the leaky barn.

Now I need some volunteers—Kara, Dan, Raoul, Mara, bring your chairs up to the front of the room. You are going to help me model the strategy we are going to use with this poem. It’s called **Save the Last Word for Me.**”

Raoul said, “I like the line ‘but not a man for farming, say the fields.’” Ms. Snow stopped Raoul. “Don’t say any more; don’t tell us why you chose that line. Now Mara, you have up to one minute to react or respond to this line. Mara thought for a moment. “Why would someone who’s not good at farming live on a farm? Why did he become a farmer? Why didn’t he fix things like the leaky roof?” Next Dan weighed in. “It seems like they’re poor. Is it because the farmer doesn’t work hard enough? Or was his tractor broken? I’m wondering if he was weak or sickly.” After Kara wondered if the guy maybe inherited the farm, it was Raoul’s turn again.

“So, Raoul, why did you select the line? You get the last word.” “I like the fields talking part—having the fields talk like they’re telling on the guy. Like it’s the evidence that he is a guy who

isn't a good farmer, but the poet doesn't have to say it. I don't know, I just liked it." "Okay, good. So how does the poet use language to help you 'see' that image?" Raoul answered, "Ted Kooser makes us see fields that have rocks in them instead of crops, and a barn that needs a new roof because it has leaks in it." Ms. Snow nodded in agreement. "I like the way you noticed Ted Kooser's use of imagery, Raoul, and hearing the group's interpretations of the poem helped me to think about lots of different scenarios. Can anyone try to sum up or give the gist of what the first stanza is about?" Stephen looked thoughtful and Ms. Snow asked him what he was thinking. Stephen said, "About my growling stomach or the poem?" Ms. Snow said, "Now there's an image we're probably all having right now—a growling stomach, but I digress. Back to the poem, Stephen." "I think the first stanza is about a big man who lived on a farm and was not good at farming or chores, but that he was a good person." Bob added, "And the bible said he was religious, too."

"Nicely done. Now, in the next part of the period you are all going to use a strategy called **Save the Last Word for Me**. It is a two part strategy—first you work by yourselves and then you will work with others in a group of four."

"Here's how Part 1 works. I am going to ask you to select two lines from each stanza that strike you as particularly powerful. I want you to pick the line which generates a strong image for you and a line that evokes an emotional reaction. There are two more stanzas so you will have four lines that you select. I am going to give each of you a copy of the poem and four index cards. On one side of each card you will write the line that strikes you. On the other, why you find the line powerful—and this could be personal—and then I want you to think about how the author uses language to create the image and jot down a thought about that as well. You might want to use the terms we discussed—figurative language, symbols, imagery, and tone—or you might use the term personification or metaphor—just take a stab at it. No right or wrong here—just some deep thinking about the imagery in two powerful lines that you select—how it strikes you, why it strikes you, and how Ted Kooser, the poet, uses language to make it happen. Note which stanza of the poem contains the lines you selected.

Now do a good job on these—you will be sharing them in small groups in a few minutes when we do Part II of **Save the Last Word for Me**."

As the students began to select their quotes and write the reasons for their choices, Ms. Snow circled the room to answer questions and provide support.

After Reading/Learning

"Now I'd like you to form groups of four. One person will first read aloud a quotation and ask others to respond. When they finish, that person gets the last word."

Students began working but there was some confusion about the process, so Ms. Snow stopped by several desks and prompted students to only read the quote, not the reason, before the group discussion. Slowly the group discussions began to flow smoothly as students discussed the poem and she noticed that several had selected the same lines.

As Ms. Snow circulated around the room she heard students' thinking out loud. "I think 'and the winter's cold, say the rags in the window frames.' I don't know—for some reason, I can just feel the leaky drafts from the window in that line and it feels sad and lonely to me. I like the image that is created. And the way the rags are talking."

Ms. Snow quieted the groups, some of whom were finished and some of whom were still doing rounds of **Save the Last Word for Me**. “I am sorry to interrupt those of you who have not finished your rounds of discussion, but I need to give you directions on how to finish up our work before the end of class. The next step is to work together as a group to do a **Quick Write**. You need to identify a note taker to record the thinking of the group for the **Quick Write**. Now listen carefully to these directions for the **Quick Write**.

- 1) The group will choose four lines in the poem which are examples of the four types of language: figurative, imagery, symbols, and tone. The note taker will record the line of the poem and the type of language convention associated with the selected line.
- 2) The note taker will record the group consensus for the gist of each stanza (1–3) by completing this sentence starter: This stanza was about....
- 3) The note taker will record the group consensus of what happened to the family by completing this sentence starter: Something went wrong. We think it was... (and tell why).”

As the period ended, Ms. Snow checked in to see how they liked the **Save the Last Word for Me** discussion and complimented the groups. “You have done some great meaning making and interpretation in your groups. Your discussions of the quotations clearly showed you grasped the author’s meaning. So what did you think of this strategy? How did it affect your engagement with the poem or your thinking about what it meant?” A few students shared: “I got a better sense of it when I heard what others think.” “It was a lot better than I thought it would be—I hate poetry.” “It was okay—I liked that we could write down the lines we liked first.” Again, Ms. Snow complimented them and told them they would be using the strategy again the next day with a tougher poem now that they knew how they could work together to have a discussion about a poem. She reminded note takers from each group to put the names of the group members on the **Quick Write** and turn it in on the way out the door. When reflecting on the class, Ms. Snow thought the level of discussion and engagement for this poem boded well for the poetry unit and she was glad she had tried the strategy.