

Literacy Tips



Tips for middle school educators on various topics such as grammar, writing, reading, spelling, vocabulary, cooperative learning and more.

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Tip #40: Poetry Island

Just two more days 'til break! Then we can really focus on last minute shopping, travel plans, etc. Because you are all so efficient at what you do, I imagine you are already planning where to pick up again in your curriculum after the new year. Why not consider coming back from winter break and shaking up your routine? It's time for another quick immersion into poetry. Don't wait for April's National Poetry Month to introduce this genre. You should be weaving it into your curriculum as much as possible. Here is a "one-week plus a few days" poetry unit. Enjoy Poetry Island!

www.gretchenle.com/survivors/survivindex.html#anchor220052

This clever unit written by Gretchen Lee imitates the ever-popular reality television show, *Survivor*. Be sure to look not only at this link but also her links to the rules and to the presentations. Students work in groups for only one week focusing on a poet of their choice. They present a poem-a-day to the class using four unique formats from Monday - Thursday: Mood Music, *Frozen Tableau, Artistic Interpretation, and Drama! On the fifth and last day, you have a poetry party and students write reflective essays.

*Gretchen says, "Frozen Tableau (from Jeff Wilhelm's wonderful book *You Gotta Be the Book*) - freeze into statues that represent parts of the poem - characters, objects, items, etc.

Each statue should have a line ready which explains what s/he is feeling or experiencing at that moment." I liked this idea of Frozen Tableau, so I went surfing to find out more about it. See how it plays out with nonfiction text. The following web site describes a teacher using this strategy with her students who are reading about dolphins.

www.middleweb.com/ReadWrkshp/JK_CL_11.html

Each day individual students vote using a paragraph "ballot" assignment. This spins the positive rather than negative of voting someone off. Regardless of the outcome, everyone continues with the daily work. They must describe which poem/poet presented that day should continue on. Students write well-constructed paragraphs making direct references to the poems presented and refer to the poetic devices they have previously been taught like simile, metaphor, personification, meter, etc.

Prerequisite skills for this unit are being able to successfully identify poetic devices, which can be accomplished by having students create a mini-dictionary of terms. Have them prepare a Dinah Zike (notch and shave) booklet. This uses just xerox paper and scissors. No tape or staples are necessary, and the students find it very cool! Summer school writing teachers know how to make these and



so do teachers who have been exposed to other Dinah Zike paper folding techniques.

<http://dinah.com>

Select the poetic devices you want to focus on from your literature anthology text. Our performance standards cover both poetic devices and figurative language. Below is the list of terms I used because I am more familiar with the Holt, *Elements of Literature*, 8th grade. Ask students to record a term on each page in the notch & shave booklet. Then model for the students how to complete 2 column notes: left side (taking notes) and right side (making notes). Here are the terms I have used in the past:

- alliteration
- allusion
- free verse
- imagery
- metaphor
- meter
- onomatopoeia
- personification
- refrain
- rhyme
- simile

This is my think-aloud example to show them how to make these dictionaries.

"Let me read to you about alliteration. I am not sure where I am going to find it in this text, so I am going to go right to the index at the back. OK, p. 373. I know I am going to want to remember this material, so I am going to take notes on the left side of my booklet and make notes on the right side. Let me begin reading aloud, and I will think out loud and show you what my notes might look like. (I begin reading aloud and stop at a logical place in the text.) This beginning part gives me a pretty good definition of alliteration. I know definitions are important. I'll write that down, but I don't have a lot of time so I am going to get creative with abbreviations and leave out unnecessary, smaller words. To really cement this in my mind and put it into my long term memory, I am

going to now think of a personal connection to what I have just read. Maybe I will even sketch something, too, and get the right side of my brain involved. Well, the repeating of the same letters or sounds reminds me of tongue twisters like Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers. I'll write just a bit of that tongue twister down on the making notes side of my booklet..."

Below is what I might end up putting on the overhead without the quick sketches. I really recommend encouraging students to draw their thoughts using color when it enhances meaning, which seems to improve retention of the material. Students need to be immersed with poetry for pleasure reading, too. That way they can go language scouting for examples of these poetic devices. Give extra points for each example of alliteration they bring in and so on with all of these terms.

alliteration (p.373)

<i>Taking Notes</i> (info. from text)	<i>Making Notes</i> (what I connect it to, I am thinking...)
Repetition of the same letter or sounds in words	Peter Piper picked a Tongue Twisters!
<i>Silken, sad, uncertain rustling</i> from "The Raven" by Poe	Poe also wrote the "Tell-Tale Heart"
Creates onomatopoeia	Term is also in my dictionary
Helps create mood, rhythm, or to let ring	Another poem we read, "Give Me a Book," had a mind alliteration in it
	The double P's in the term will help me remember this

