

Lesson Plan

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Grade Level:
9-12



Poetry Out Loud

Scope
Number of sessions:
6
Time of sessions:
1-2 hours

NCTE Standards:
1, 2, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

Acknowledgements

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Overview

The Poetry Out Loud program builds on the recent resurgence of poetry as an oral art form, as demonstrated by the slam poetry movement and the immense popularity of rap music among our youth. The program encourages the nation's high school students to learn about great poetry through memorization and performance, helping them to internalize and perpetuate our rich literary heritage while mastering public speaking skills and building self-confidence. The contest structure is similar to a spelling bee, with classroom, school-wide, county, and state level competitions.

The following lesson plan is divided into six sessions, each designed to walk the student through the various phases of understanding, appreciating, memorizing and reciting great poetry.

Session 1: Introductions

Introduction

The main points of the first session are: to begin a dialogue about the historical and modern importance of performing poetry, to familiarize the student with the contest structure, and to motivate the students' excitement about performing poetry using videos of engaging and effective poetry performances.

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Identify the value of performing poetry in front of an audience.
- Comprehend the requirements of the Poetry Out Loud competition.
- Engage with several videos that depict performance poetry and discuss the qualities of effective recitations.

Iowa Poetry Out Loud



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Classroom Session 1: Introductions

Materials:

Access to performance poetry videos or DVDs (Internet & YouTube are great resources)

Anticipatory Set

Students will participate in an introductory game where they will be asked to share their names as well as the name of a poem or poet they like. After the first student shares, the next student will be asked to give their information and repeat what was said by the student before them. This memory exercise will allow the students as well as the instructor to get to know each other in a playful manner.

Input

The teacher will:

- Briefly lecture about the history and characteristics of performance poetry (see attached lecture notes).
- Discuss the rules and structure of the Poetry Out Loud competition.
- Show several videos of effective performance poetry pieces and lead a discussion.
 - What makes these recitations effective? What are the roles of body language, enunciation, and engagement with the writing?
 - What might be some common mistakes that one could make in performing a poem in front of an audience?

Guided Practice

Students will be asked to browse through poems in the Poetry Out Loud anthology so that each of them may start to consider which two poems they would like to choose for the competition. When the students are finished searching, several may be asked to volunteer to informally read one of their poems aloud.

Checking for Understanding

The students will be able to verbally answer:

- Why have artists, for centuries, been drawn to the verbal performance of poetry?
- What does the instructor expect you to accomplish in the next six weeks? What are the qualifications for the Poetry Out Loud competition?
- Why were the videos of poetry recitations effective? How did the performer succeed in connecting with both the text and the audience?

Closure

The instructor will provide a closing lecture, reiterating the significance of having the skills to perform poetry in front of an audience, as well as the value of poetry in general. Students will also be reminded of the incentives associated with participating in such a worthwhile competition.

Independent Practice

The students will:

Choose two poems from the Poetry Out Loud anthology to commit to memory for the competition.

Classroom Session 2: Memorization Techniques

Materials:

Handout on mnemonic devices.

Introduction

The main focuses of the second session are: to familiarize students with different memorization techniques, to give students the opportunity to begin reciting out loud the poems they have chosen, and to begin developing students' understanding of their chosen poems.

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Learn new techniques for memorization
- Become more familiar with the ways their poems sound
- Begin to discuss thematic motifs and meanings of their selected poems

Anticipatory Set

Students will participate in a prompted creative writing activity.

Prompt: Think of some things in your life that you've had to try quite determinedly to memorize or remember. What sort of process did you go through to assist you in this activity? Write a creative response dealing with memorization. This can be a poem, a flash fiction, or nonfiction piece. Teacher should ask a few students to share their work to end the exercise.

Input

The teacher will:

- Talk to the students about the processes they went through when selecting their poems, ask questions about how they chose them, sample the audience to see what sorts of poems they have chosen.
- Take a few examples from the class and look at them critically.
- Provide a lecture on memorization techniques and methods.
- Talk about mnemonic devices they currently recall or remember from their prior schooling
- Introduce new mnemonic methods by distributing a memorization technique handout to be used in memorizing their poems
- Stress the importance of repeating and re-reading to retain the poems in memory

Guided Practice

Students will break into small groups and recite their chosen poems out loud to begin to get a sense of how the poems sound and feel. Students will also begin to discuss the poem's meaning with each other. Encourage collaboration when students are trying to understand their poems' meanings.

Checking for Understanding

Students will be able to verbally answer:

- How can memorization techniques be implemented to remember poetry?
- What are some other applications for these memorization techniques?
- What are my first impressions about my poems' meanings?

Closure

Once the lecture on memorization techniques is complete, the teachers and students can talk about ways that they think they will be able to help with learning the new poem for next week. They can also discuss how reading the poem out loud, even to nobody, will help them perfect their tone and rhythm of voice. The instructor will then issue the homework assignment for next week and discuss how they might complete it.

Independent Practice

Students will:

- Continue to work on memorizing their first poem.
- Begin using the memorization techniques to memorize the second poem as well.
- Continue to think about what the poems they have selected might mean.

Materials

Access to performance poetry videos or DVDs (internet & YouTube are great resources)

Classroom Session 3: Practice, Practice, Practice

Materials

Access to performance poetry videos or DVDs (internet & YouTube are great resources)

Introduction

The main focuses of the third session are: familiarizing the students with judging criteria for the Poetry Out Loud competition and guiding students to apply their knowledge of poetry performance to the recitation of their chosen poems.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Identify the specific evaluation criteria for the Poetry Out Loud competition.
- Apply knowledge of poetry performance to the recitation of the poems they have memorized
- Critique other recitation performances in small groups.

Anticipatory Set

Students will be shown several videos of poetry performances from the Poetry Out Loud Best Performances DVD (also available for download on the Poetry Out Loud web site) and YouTube. They will then be asked to discuss what made the recitations either effective or ineffective.

Input

The teacher will:

- Offer lecture and discussion regarding the evaluation criteria for the Poetry Out Loud competition. Now that the students have one poem memorized and are meeting in smaller groups, the instructor will provide them with a thorough understanding of what they should and should not do in order to succeed in the competition.
 - Explain the importance of physical presence. (i.e. posture, eye contact, body language, and the avoidance of seeming artificial).
 - Address voice and articulation. (i.e. volume, speed, inflection, and pronunciation)

- Discuss appropriateness of dramatization (i.e. theatrical presentation, necessary versus unnecessary physical gestures)
 - Reiterate the value of understanding the meaning of the poem. (i.e. attentiveness to messages, line breaks, tones, and allusions).
 - Stress the importance of accuracy.
- Set parameters for small-group recitation and critique exercise.

Guided Practice

The students will be asked to find a partner with whom they will then recite their poems and offer criticism on the performances. Students will then be told to pair up with a different partner and repeat the exercise. After doing this several times, students will be asked to volunteer to read their poems in front of the class.

Checking for Understanding

Students will be able to verbally answer:

- In terms of presence, volume, understanding, and dramatization, what things should you try to work on? What should you avoid?
- What key areas of performance and recitation are judged during the Poetry Out Loud competition?

Closure

Students will be asked to reflect briefly on their experiences with reciting poems to each other and in front of the class. The instructor will encourage students to practice their poems outside of class in front of friends, family, or in front of the mirror.

Independent Practice

The students will

- Memorize the second poem that they have chosen from the Poetry Out Loud anthology.

Classroom Session 4: The Tone Map

Materials

Video camera, copies of “Jenny Kissed Me” tone map (from Teacher’s Guide), and access to performance poetry videos/DVDs

Introduction

The main focuses of the fourth session are: teaching students to understand the role of tone in poetry recitation and having students identify and understand the various tones they can use in the poems they have chosen to memorize.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Identify the importance of understanding tone in poetry.
- Identify what tone works well with each line of the poems they have memorized.
- Justify why certain tones are more effective than others.
- Show a deeper understanding of their chosen poems.
- Show greater comfort performing in front of an audience.
- Identify the weaknesses and strengths in their own and each other’s performances.

Anticipatory Set

Students will use lines from the poems they have memorized to write their own poems. Have them think of a line they particularly like: a piece of imagery they respond to, a line that contains catchy alliteration, an emotional moment in the poem's narrative - anything that stands out to them in the poems they have chosen. Students can use that line as a starting point. A few ideas: use the line as the first line in their poem, use the content contained in the line to "riff" off of, imitate the style of the poet's language.

Input

The teacher will

- Provide a video to show the students more examples of strong performances and aspects of performance poetry that work well.
- Distribute the tone map handouts and discuss the example tone map "Jenny Kissed Me" in front of the class.
- Explain to the students how to create a tone map of their own and the importance of figuring out which tones works well with each of their individual poems.
- Divide students into pairs to create their own tone maps and practice reciting their poems.
- Videotape each student reading in front of the class (at the end of class) and distribute the videos via email for the students to watch at home.

Guided Practice

Give students time to create tone maps of their two chosen poems. Encourage students to work together and to use dictionaries (both in print and online) to define words on the tone map list that are unfamiliar. Once they have completed their tone maps, have students practice reciting their poems to each other.

Checking for Understanding

The students will be able to verbally answer:

- How does tone affect a poem?
- What tones evoke the strongest responses from an audience?
- What were some common mistakes in the recitations your peers gave?

Closure

The instructor will provide a brief closing lecture reiterating the importance of tone. The instructor will detail the assignment of watching and writing a critique on the student's own performance.

Independent Practice

The students will:

- Watch the videos of their performances at home.
- Write a one-page critique of their performance, detailing its strengths and weaknesses.

Classroom Session 5: The Mini-Competition

Materials:

Video camera, copies of the Poetry Out Loud evaluation form (from Teacher's Guide)

Introduction

The main focus of the fifth session is: having students perform their poems in a fun yet competitive environment.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Demonstrate more comfort and confidence performing in front of an audience.
- Become familiar with judging criteria and evaluation forms for the POL contest.
- Demonstrate an awareness of audience dynamics

Anticipatory Set

Students will participate in a prompted creative writing activity.

Prompt: Imagine yourself performing one of your poems in front of a large, engaged audience. Imagine they want to hear every word you have to say. Imagine that your poem is the best poem ever to have been written. Write a short creative response to your imagined reading from the perspective of someone in the audience. Piece should be in third person. Teacher should have 4-5 students volunteer to share their writing at end of activity.

Input

The teacher will:

- Collect student reflections (homework from Session 4).
- Provide a short re-cap lecture on issues of stage presence and audience.
 - What makes a strong/weak performance?
 - Do's and Don'ts of performing
 - Audience awareness as a performer
 - Active vs. passive listening as an audience member, thinking critically about the performer and their performance
- Discuss/decide order of students in mini-competition
- Hand out evaluation forms, 4 per student, and explain judging criteria. Students are to choose 5 of their peers' performances to give numerical AND specific feedback on. Students should write their names on the evaluation for accountability, but teacher should make clear that the performers will not see these evaluations. Encourage honesty in their scores. Teacher will collect these at end of session and review for participation points.
- Explain set-up of mini-competition: 10 randomly selected students from each participating class will be performing. Students from the different classes will alternate in order for the recitations.
- Introduce first student (one teacher should act as emcee) and pace other student readers.
- Videotape each student reading in front of the class and distribute the videos via e-mail for the students to watch at home.

Checking for Understanding

Students will be able to answer verbally:

- What makes a strong and weak performance?
- Why is audience awareness important as a performer?
- What constitutes being an active audience member?
- Offer personal reflection about themselves as performers.

Closure

Once mini-competition is complete, collect students' evaluation forms and facilitate an open-forum discussion about it. What did students notice about performers? What can they take away for their own performances? Were any performances especially good?

Independent Practice

Students will:

- Continue to rehearse their poems on their own.
- Watch videos of student performances from class. Reflect on strengths and weaknesses of the difference performances.
- Re-visit the Poetry Out Loud website and view past winners' performances.
- Write a two-page double-spaced reflection on their experience with Poetry Out Loud. Students may reflect on their poems, the process of becoming intimate with their poems, the process of getting comfortable performing their poems, how the contest was structured, how they might do it differently, what they learned about poetry, what they learned about performance, what they learned by watching the mini-competition, etc.

Classroom Session 6: The Classroom Competition

Materials

Copies of the Poetry Out Loud evaluation form (from Teacher's Guide) for judges, pizza/snacks for celebration after competition (optional).

Introduction

The main focuses of the sixth session are: having students perform their poems in a fun yet competitive environment and determining the top five students who will move on to the school's final competition.

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Become more comfortable performing in front of an audience.
- Synthesize the performance ethos they have developed over the last five weeks.
- Demonstrate mastery of the poem they have chosen to perform using tone of voice, diction, expression.
- Be judged on their performances.
- Experience being a knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical member of the literary community.

Anticipatory Set

Have students pair off and allow them 10 minutes to rehearse. Encourage students to give each other mostly positive feedback, a pep talk to get each other excited about their performances.

Input

The teacher will:

- Collect student reflections (homework from Session 5).
- Introduce judges and give them evaluation forms.
- Remind students of recitation format (announcing name of poem, rules on gesturing, etc).
- Recap on what criteria students are being evaluated.
- Recap active listening skills from last week and remind students of respect they should give their peers. Remind students that performing is not easy for anyone.

- Introduce first student and pace other student readers, making sure to give judges time to score
- Tally and announce top three students who will continue on to school finals
- Pizza party!

Checking for Understanding

Students will be able to verbally answer:

- What is the acceptable recitation format?
- What things are prohibited while reciting?
- What criteria are evaluations based on?
- What constitutes being an active audience member?
- Offer personal reflection about their performances and how they might apply their recitation skills to other areas of their lives.

Closure

Once competition is complete, the teacher will congratulate those students moving on to finals and give positive reinforcement to all students who participated in the competition. The teacher will facilitate an informal discussion and reflection about the competition while the pizza party is going on. What made the top five students' performances exceptional? What did students notice about performers? How can students use what they have learned with Poetry Out Loud in the world at large? When do students imagine having to recite a poem again? How has this experience influenced their views on poetry?